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DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

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Lack of security makes State ATMs easy robbery target

There are glaring lapses in State's ATM security infrastructure. Short-staffed banks stay mum about robberies to save face. Hameed Ashraf reports after back-to-back robberies in the State.
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India, China to resume Kailash Yatra, direct flights

India's Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi during a meeting in Beijing on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

BEIJING, 27 JAN

India and China have announced measures to rebuild ties, including resuming the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra in summer 2025 and agreeing in principle to restore direct flights, marking a significant step towards normalising relations after disengaging troops in eastern Ladakh.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri held talks with Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Sun Weidong in Beijing, discussing the resumption of hydrological data provision and cooperation on trans-border rivers. They also agreed to meet soon to negotiate an updated framework for direct air services and enhance people-to-people exchanges, including media and think-tank interactions. Both sides highlighted the 75th anniversary of diplomatic ties in 2025 as an opportunity to boost public diplomacy and mutual trust. Misri's trip followed talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping in Kazan in October, where they agreed to stabilise and rebuild bilateral relations through people-centric steps.

The Kailash Mansarovar Yatra and direct flights were suspended in 2020, but both sides are now focused on resuming these initiatives. Additionally, economic and trade concerns were discussed to ensure long-term policy transparency. The India-China expert level mechanism will meet to address these issues. India also emphasized that ties cannot return to normal without peace at the border, following the completion of disengagement in Demchok and Depsang, allowing resumed patrolling by both militaries.

India and China should meet each other halfway and commit themselves to mutual understanding rather than mutual suspicion, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi said on Monday as he met Misri. *—PTI*

Waqf Bill panel clears 14 changes, rejects Oppn's 44

Oppn says Bill is draconian, will interfere in Muslims' affairs

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

The Joint Committee of Parliament examining the Waqf (Amendment) Bill, 2024, approved 14 amendments and rejected 44 others on Monday.

The panel is set to propose that existing "Waqf by user" properties will remain so if not in dispute or are government facilities but they must be registered before the new law takes effect, providing little relief to Waqf bodies in their unverified title claims.

Opposition MPs claimed that the law proposed by the committee is "draconian" and will interfere in Muslims' religious affairs. The Bill allows Waqf boards to decide on welfare measures for widows and orphans. The meeting of the committee headed by BJP MP Jagdambika Pal was again marked by noisy pro-tests by Opposition, who accused him of "subverting" democratic process. The panel is set to adopt its report on Wednesday with MPs of Congress, TMC, DMK and the AIMIM expected to give their dissent, sources said.

With Parliament's Budget Session beginning on 31 January, the nda can get the Bill passed in the first half of the session as it enjoys a majority in both the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha. Among the amendments that may draw further objection from Muslims and Opposition is that a Waqf board can now have even four non-Muslim members instead of two.

Opposition MPs at Waqf JPC meet in New Delhi on Monday **PHOTO: PTI**

While the Bill states that only a person practising Islam for at least five years may declare a Waqf, which refers to properties dedicated exclusively for religious or charitable purposes under Islamic law, an approved amendment adds that such a person should be showing or demonstrating that he or she is practising the religion for five years, according to the sources. Among the other amendments supported by the BJP and its allies and adopted by the committee with 16-10 votes in favour is to do away with vesting any inquiry into disputes over a government property with the district collector concerned, the sources said. In total, hundreds of amendments were proposed by the committee members. *—PTI*
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MUDA CASE

HC stays summon by ED to CM's wife

BENGALURU, 27 JAN

High Court on Monday stayed the notice issued by Enforcement Directorate (ED) to Chief Minister Siddaramaiah's wife Parvathi BM and the state Urban Development Minister Byrathi Suresh to appear for questioning in connection with the MUDA land allotment scam.

The ED has issued summons to Parvathi to appear before the investigation officer on Tuesday, while Suresh was asked to depose on Monday.

In the MUDA site allotment case, it is alleged that compensatory sites were allotted to Siddaramaiah's wife in an upmarket area in Mysuru, which had higher property value as compared to the location of her land which had been "acquired" by the Mysore Urban Development Authority (MUDA).

MUDA had allotted plots to Parvathi under a 50:50 ratio scheme in lieu of 3.16 acres of her land, where it developed a residential layout. Under the controversial scheme, MUDA allotted 50 per cent of developed land to the land losers in lieu of undeveloped land acquired from them for forming residential layouts. It is alleged Parvathi had no legal title over this 3.16 acres of land at survey number 464 of Kasare village, Kasaba hobli of Mysuru taluk. Lokayukta as well as the ED are probing the matter simultaneously. Meanwhile, the High Court also reserved its order on whether to transfer the MUDA case to an inde-pendent agency, such as the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI).

BJP said the Parvathi and Suresh cannot escape from the Enforcement Directorate in the MUDA site allotment scam. *—PTI*

Investors lose Rs 9Lcr as mkt falls to 7-month ow

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Stock investors took a severe hit on Monday as key indices slumped to more than seven-month lows due to widespread selling amid increased uncertainty over US trade policy, wiping out Rs 9.28 lakh crore of market wealth. The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies tanked Rs 9,20,654.51 crore to Rs 4,10,31,199.48 or USD 4.75 trillion. The market breadth was negative as 3,588 shares declined, 532 advanced and 114 stocks remain unchanged. The 30-share BSE barometer plunged by 824.29 points or 1.08 per cent to close at 75,366.17, a lev-el not seen since June 2024. During the day, the barometer plummeted 922.87 points or 1.2 per cent to a low of 75,267.59. The broader 50-share Nifty dropped by 263.05 points or 1.14 per cent to close at 22,829.15, tanking below the 23,000-level for the first time since 6 June, 2024. *—PTI*
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Uttarakhand becomes first state to implement UCC

DEHRADUN, 27 JAN

BJP-ruled Uttarakhand on Monday became the first state in India to implement the Uniform Civil Code, which promotes equal laws for every citizen across all religions and standardises personal laws on marriage, divorce and property. With the implementation of the UCC which applies to all people of Uttarakhand except those belong-ing to the Scheduled Tribe community, BJP has fulfilled a major commitment made to people of the state ahead of the 2022 Assembly polls, which saw the party storming to power for a second con-secutive term.

Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami announced UCC's implementation at a programme at his official residence here.

"With the implementation of UCC, the BJP has fulfilled all its major ideological commitments includ-ing abrogation of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir, illegalisation of triple talaq, the CAA and build-ing of a Ram temple in Ayodhya," the chief minister said. *—PTI*
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Uttarakhand CM Pushkar Dhami

Sanatan Dharma: SC bins plea for FIR against Stalin's son

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Supreme Court on Monday refused to examine pleas seeking FIR against Tamil Nadu Deputy Chief Minister Udhayanidhi Stalin over his "eradicate Sanatan Dharma" remark in 2023.

The three petitions came up for hearing before a bench of Justices Bela M Trivedi and Prasanna B Varale. After the bench asked how petitions filed under Article 32 of the Constitution could be maintained, the petitioners' counsel sought permission to withdraw the pleas with a liberty to pursue an appropriate remedy. Udhayanidhi, son of Tamil Nadu Chief Minister and ruling DMK chief MK Stalin, was accused of passing the remark which a plea alleged was hate speech. *—PTI*

US RAIDS GURUDWARAS & SCHOOLS FOR IMMIGRANTS

WASHINGTON, 27 JAN

The Donald Trump administration's crackdown against illegal immigration continues to intensify, as the US Justice Department said it had begun making arrests in schools, churches and gurudwaras in Chicago, New York and New Jersey as part of a multi-agency enforcement operation, the New York Times reported.

US Vice President JD Vance said he hoped immigration raids on schools would have a "chilling effect on illegal immigrants coming to our country".

Vance said immigration raids in religious buildings and schools should not be ruled out. "If you have a person who is convicted of a violent crime, whether they are an illegal immigrant or not, you have to go and get that person to protect the public safety," he said.

Trump's Border Czar Tom Homan has said immigration officials will need at least 1,00,000 beds to support Trump's sweeping deportation efforts. He called on the US Congress to "come to the table quick and give us the money we need". *—ANI*

Modi, Trump talk bilateral ties on call

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump on Monday held a phone conversation focusing on continuing the upward trajectory of India-US ties.

Following the phone talks, Modi said both sides are committed to mutually beneficial and trusted partnership.

This was the first conversation between both leaders since US President Donald Trump's return to the White House. During the conversation, both leaders discussed bilateral ties Trump began his second term last Monday with a flurry of executive actions aimed at overhauling US immigration, and the H1-B visas that allow companies to bring foreigners with specific qualifications to the United States. *—PTI*
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K'taka man kills self after wife demands ₹20L alimony

HUBBALLI, 27 JAN

A 40-year-old man died by suicide at his home due to alleged harassment by his wife, police said. The incident occurred in Chamundeshwari Nagar, Hubballi on Sunday.

Petaru Gollapalli, who worked in a private firm, left behind a suicide note alleging harassment by his wife. The note said that his wife was "killing him" and "wanted his death." Petaru was working at a private firm but lost his job three months ago.

Preliminary inquiry has revealed that the couple got married two years ago and started living sepa-rately after three months of marriage following frequent quarrels. His wife has also filed for a divorce and demanded Rs 20 lakhs as an alimony. Last month, a 34-year-old techie, Atul Subhash, died by suicide in Bengaluru following alleged harassment by his wife and her family. *—PTI*

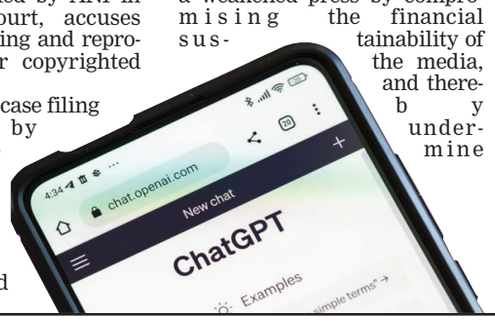
CASE IN DELHI HC

Indian news organisations sue OpenAI over copyrights

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Leading Indian news outlets, including the Digital News Publishers Association (DNPA) members such as NDTV, the Indian Express, India Today Group, Hindustan Times and Network18 have joined ANI's lawsuit against OpenAI. The case, initially filed by ANI in Delhi High Court, accuses OpenAI of scraping and reproduction of their copyrighted content.

In the 135-page case filing reviewed by Reuters, the DNPA— compromising of around 20 of the most prominent news organizations— said OpenAI demonstrated a clear and present danger to copyrights. They argued that the practice of "willfully scrapping" and training AI models on copyrighted materials solely benefitted tech companies. They further added that a profit driven business approach from the AI company would result in a weakened press by compromising the financial sustainability of the media, and thereby undermine democracy.



Reuters had reported that OpenAI said that any order to delete training data would violate its legal obligations in the US and that India had no jurisdiction to file a copyright case as the company's servers are abroad. OpenAI had recently reached an agreement with Time magazine, the Associated Press and Vox Media and several other companies, allowing the tech company to store and display their content, while allowing the media companies to benefit from AI advancement. The filings stated that OpenAI had not entered into partnership agreements with media outlets in the country, displaying a clear disregard for local laws and the media industry. *—Salar News*

CHAK DE INDIA

BUMRAH IS ICC MEN'S TEST CRICKETER OF THE YEAR

Returning from a lengthy injury forced hiatus, Jasprit Bumrah had a record-breaking year. Here are some of his milestones:

- 71 test wickets in 13 Test matches.
- Highest wicket taker in Test cricket for 2024. Gus Atkinson, comes 2nd with 52 wickets in 11 matches.
- 14.92 average with 30.1 strike rate.
- 200 wickets in 44 Tests.
- 32 wickets in 5 BGT matches.
- 1st Indian pacer to receive the award, 6th Indian overall.
- 4th India bowler to take more than 70 wickets in a year.

MANDHANA IS ICC ODI CRICKETER OF THE YEAR

Indian vice-captain scoring four centuries in a year, the most in women's cricket. Here are some of her highlights in 2024:

- Scored 747 in 13 innings.
- Average of 57.86.
- Strike rate of 95.1.
- Her back-to-back centuries guided India to a 3-0 victory in South Africa.
- Hit 101 boundaries, 95 fours and 6 maximums.
- She scored fastest ODI century in just 70 balls.
- This is the second time Mandhana has won this award in 2018.

PHOTO: ANI

Kotekar bank heist: ₹4 cr recovered, 4 held

MANGALURU: 27 JAN

Police have recovered cash and gold ornaments worth Rs 4 crore stolen from Kotekar Co-operative Bank and arrested four persons in this connection, officials said on Monday. Mangaluru Police Commissioner Anupam Agarwal lauded the police team which solved the case. On 17 January, four masked and armed individuals struck the bank, making off with cash and gold jewelry. Investigators pointed out that lapses on the bank's part, such as non-functional CCTV cameras and the master locker left open, contributed to the ease with which the offenders carried out the robbery. Agarwal said, "The 18.3kg of gold and 3.8 lakh in cash along with the weapons, getaway car and two fake number plates used for the robbery have been recovered. We have arrested four accused, and a hunt is on for four more people involved in the bank heists." *—Salar News*

Two City bikers killed in head-on collision

BENGALURU, 27 JAN

Two bikers, including a college student, were killed in a tragic collision near Honnenahalli Gate, Yelahanka, on Monday morning. Tejas, a 22-year-old BBA student from Presidency College, was heading to campus, while Pavan, a 32-year-old private firm employee, was on his way to work when the two motorcycles collided under unclear circumstances. Tejas died instantly, and Pavan succumbed to his injuries while being taken to the hospital. The accident caused severe traffic disruptions as authorities worked to clear the scene. Both bodies were sent to a nearby government hospital for post-mortem. A case has been registered, and investigations are ongoing to determine the cause of the accident. *—Salar News*

Man nabbed at KIA for trying to travel with fake UK visa

BENGALURU, 27 JAN

A 32-year-old man was arrested at Kempegowda International Airport (KIA) on January 25 for attempting to board a flight to London with a forged UK visa. The accused, Pradeep Singh, an employee from Jalandhar, Punjab, submitted his travel documents for verification, raising suspicions among immigration officials. Upon contacting the UK Border Agency and the British High Commission, officials confirmed that no visa had been issued to Singh. Further investigation revealed that Singh had hired a local tout, identified as Pappu, in Jalandhar, to procure a fake work visa. Singh allegedly paid for the forged visa, which was inserted into his passport. A case of forgery has been registered, and authorities are tracking the tout involved. *—Salar News*

Tigress, 3 cubs spotted in Nanjangud

MYSURU, 27 JAN

A tigress with its three cubs was spotted at Madhuvanahalli village in Nanjangud taluk of the district on Sunday night, triggering panic among the villagers. The big cats were seen near a water tank opposite to the house of one Nataraj around 7.30pm. One of the villagers, who is attached to the forest department, spotted the tigers and recorded their movement on his cell phone camera. Following the incident, forest officials have installed a in the village to trap the tiers and installed CCTV cameras at strategic locations to capture their movements. The villagers said the tigers might have strayed from nearby Omkar Forest. *—Salar News*

STATE ATMs LACK BASIC SECURITY

ATMs are easy robbery targets; banks do not report robberies to save reputation

HAMEED ASHRAF

BENGALURU, 27 JAN

State's ATM security infrastructure is under scrutiny after back-to-back robberies in Bidar and Mangaluru exposed alarming lapses on 16 and 17 January.

According to the Union Finance Ministry, Karnataka has the highest number of unsafe ATMs in South India. From 2017 to 2018, the State reported 14 ATM robberies, resulting in losses of Rs 60 lakh. The following year, the number surged to 16, with criminals stealing Rs 3.74 crore.

However, experts warn that these figures likely understate the full scale of the problem.

A City cop told Salar News, "Banks often underreport ATM robberies to avoid reputational damage. Many incidents go unregistered or are categorised differently."

The officer added that poorly lit, isolated ATM locations and inadequate surveillance make it easier for thieves.

On 16 January, armed assailants killed a security guard and stole Rs 93 lakh from a State Bank of India ATM in Bidar. A day later, a gang looted Kotekar Agricultural Cooperative Bank in Mangaluru, making off with Rs 4 crore. Probe suggests that interstate criminal gangs are involved.

Missed opportunities in security upgrades

The failures in ATM security are not new. In 2013, a high-profile ATM attack in Bengaluru, where a 44-year-old woman was assaulted, sparked public outrage. The state proposed hiring retired defence personnel to guard ATMs in vulnerable areas. However, the initiative faltered due to financial and logistical challenges.

Bank executives have cited the prohibitive expense of deploying armed guards at every ATM. "With thousands of machines across urban and rural areas, the financial burden was too high," said Ravi Kumar, a senior bank manager in Bengaluru. Suresh Chandra, a branch manager in Mangaluru, said, "The sheer scale of the plan was overwhelming. It wasn't just about hiring guards—it was about training them and ensuring uniform security across all areas."

On 16 January, armed assailants killed a security guard and stole Rs 93 lakh from a State Bank of India ATM in Bidar. Probe suggests that interstate criminal gangs are involved **PHOTO: SALAR**

Shivraj, an investigating officer in the Bidar ATM robbery, said, "CCTV cameras, alarm systems, and sufficient security personnel are essential. During cash replenishments, at least one armed guard should be present at sensitive areas. However, most ATMs fail to follow these basic protocols," he said.

Coordination failures

Another issue is the lack of coordination between banks and law enforcement agencies. While police are tasked with securing VIP locations, they are often stretched too thin to protect ATMs, especially during nighttime cash replenishments. "There was no clear framework for integrating security personnel into the ATM security setup," said Prakash Nair, a branch manager in Bidar. "Without proper coordination, the security measures were doomed to fail.

Robbers get smarter, security fails to keep up

Recent ATM robberies have shown an increase in criminal sophistication. In July 2024, a gang used gas cutters to steal Rs 16 lakh from an ATM on Sarjapur Road in Bengaluru. In Doddaballapur, thieves looted Rs 15.1 lakh after disabling CCTV cameras. Both robberies occurred in minutes, with no security guards present at the ATMs. The criminals managed to escape before patrolling teams arrived.

Despite technological advancements like CCTV cameras and alarm systems, ATM security remains inadequate. "The reaction time is slow because the central office monitoring the feeds is far," said a banker in Bengaluru.

Guard works long hours

Security guards at ATMs also face long hours and harsh conditions. Deepak Kumar, a guard at Vijayanagar, said, "I work twelve-hour shifts, but I'm only allowed five minutes for a bathroom break. I borrowed a chair from a nearby shop to sit." *—Salar News*

'SPEAK IN KANNADA'

CM to withdraw cases against Kannada groups

BELAGAVI, 27 JAN

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah announced on Monday that all cases registered against pro-Kannada activists will be withdrawn.

Siddaramaiah was addressing a gathering at the unveiling of the 25-feet-tall bronze statue of Bhuvaneshwari, the goddess who represents the Karnataka state identity, on the premises of the Vidhana Soudha.

The statue of Bhuvaneshwari, which was sculpted at an approximate cost of Rs 21.24 crore is 41-feet-tall including the pedestal, and weighs around 31.5 tonne.

While speaking at the event, although he acknowledged that one must love and embrace all languages, the CM said, in Karnataka, Kannadigas should follow the culture of speaking and interacting with "their brothers and other speakers" in Kannada.

"Instead of speaking incorrectly in other languages, we should speak our own language. In all our neighbouring states, the language spoken by the people of the respective state is sovereign. This should be practiced here, too," said Siddaramaiah. Insisting that everyone in the state should develop respect for the Kannada language, culture and art, HE called for more learning and teaching of reading and writing Kannada. "Only then will Kannada become the sovereign language," he added. *—PTI*

Yadgir: Micro finance firms booked

MYSURU/YADGIRI, 27 JAN

A woman in Yaddalli village in Yadgir taluk has filed an FIR against a private finance company for locking her out of her house.

Following the woman's complaint, Deputy Superintendent of Police Arun Kumar asked Yadgir Rural Police to break open the lock and let the woman enter her house.

cHowever, when her lenders mounted pressure, she returned to the village, only to find her house locked, Geetamma said.

In another development, members of a few women's self-help groups in Kembhavi town of Surapura taluk have submitted a memorandum to Yadgir Superintendent of Police Prithvik Shankar, citing harassment by microfinance companies for delays in loan repayment.

They mentioned the names of Grameen Koota Microfinance, Aashirwad Microfinance, Grama Shakti Microfinance, Samasta Microfinance, Navachetana Microfinance and RBL Microfinance in their complaint.

Geetamma took loans between Rs 30,000 and Rs 50,000 from five micro finance institutions for her son's treatment **PHOTO: SALAR**

Union minister Pralhad Joshi on Monday said the state police are shielding micro finance agencies that distribute loans to people in violation of Reserve Bank of India (RBI) guidelines. Joshi, however, refused to blame police for their lapses in rein in such agencies and said the state government must be held responsible for the mushrooming of such unauthorised agencies. Nanjangud Rural Police have registered FIR against five micro finance agencies for allegedly harassing borrowers in two cases in Nanjangud taluk. Police filed FIR against Srikshetra Dharmasthala agency following the death of Krishnamurthy of Malkundi village and Jayasheela near Hullahalli village of the taluk. This has triggered protest in the taluk. *—Salar News*

COPS BUST GANG SELLING KIDS TO CHILDLESS COUPLES

BELAGAVI, 27 JAN

Belagavi police have arrested three more members of a gang that sold a boy to a childless couple in Maharashtra for Rs 3 lakh, and handed over the child to his mother, Belagavi Superintendent of Police Bhimashankar Guled said.

The police last week busted the gang in Karnataka and Maharashtra and arrested four members. Based on information gathered from them, a team of Hukkeri police under inspector MK Basapur arrested Sangeeta Hammannavar of Kolhapur district and Mohan Tavade and his wife Sangeeta Tavade of Ratnagiri district of Maharashtra, Guled said. The gang targeted widows with single child, offering them help in getting married again. They would use this as a ploy to separate the mothers from their children and sell them. *—PTI*

BHUVANESHWARI DEVI STATUE UNVEILED

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and DyCM unveil bronze statue of Bhuvaneshwari Devi at the western entrance of Vidhana Soudha in Bengaluru on Monday **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Govt plans ₹100cr facelift to archaeological sites

KALABURAGI, 27 JAN

District In-charge Minister Priyank Kharge on Monday said the state government is planning to develop archaeological sites in Kalaburagi, spending Rs 100 crore in the next two years.

In a media interaction at the district commissioner's office, Kharge said, "Plans have been finalised to develop archaeological sites in Kalaburagi district, including sites such as Sannati, Nagavi, the Sun Temple at Chincholi and Malakhed Fort, with an expenditure of more than 50 crore. The DPRs for these sites are ready, and funds have been released to the archaeology department. Work will begin in one-and-a-half months." The minister further said, "Instructions have been given to prepare a DPR for the development of the Kalaburagi Fort. Discussions will be held with parties concerned for clearing encroachments in the fort."

The minister also said instructions have been given regarding maintenance of bank accounts by different departments. "Many departments are managing multiple bank accounts. Under the rural development and panchayat raj department, gram panchayats have several accounts related to various schemes. On average, each panchayat in the state has nine bank accounts. I have instructed officials to streamline this issue," Kharge said.

Regarding the master plan for the city, the minister said, "It should be done by urban planning experts, through the Urban Development Department, officials, corporators and elected representatives." *—Salar News*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

'Royal family will not sacrifice land'

MYSURU, 27 JAN

Mysuru MP Yaduveer Krishnadatta Chamaraja Wadiyar has urged the state government to stop misleading the public over the acquisition of Bengaluru palace grounds and instead honour the Supreme Court-mandated payment of Rs 3,011 crore in Transferable Development Rights (TDR) to the Mysuru royal family. Speaking after attending the Suttur Jatra in Nanjangud taluk, Yaduveer emphasized that the royal family has already sacrificed enough property, even donating land for public causes, and now seeks justice in protecting their remaining land.

The state cabinet's recent decision to issue an ordinance to forgo the TDR payment has prompted the royal family to continue its legal battle against the government, which is already facing contempt for defying the Supreme Court order. Yaduveer made it clear that the royal family is not asking for compensation but seeks TDR as per the court's mandate. Additionally, Yaduveer commented on the Enforcement Directorate's notice to CM Siddaramaiah's wife BM Parvathi and Urban Development Minister Byrathi Suresh in connection with the MUDA scam. He reiterated his party's call for the resignation of CM Siddaramaiah, holding him morally responsible for the scandal. *—Salar News*

2ND CASE SINCE NOV

Fire at EV showroom in Rajajinagar, 30 e-bikes destroyed

BENGALURU, 27 JAN

A massive fire broke out at the Okinawa electric bike showroom on Dr Rajkumar Road in Rajajinagar on Monday afternoon. No casualty was reported.

Eyewitnesses told **Salar News** that the fire was noticed around 2.30 pm. The occupants of the building managed to escape unhurt and alerted the police immediately, they said.

The fire quickly spread across the showroom, engulfing the entire building and causing heavy damage to the property, including the bikes stored inside. Police said at least 30 e-bikes were destroyed in the fire.

The fire department and local police rushed to the spot and doused the flames. However, multiple fire trucks on the road led to significant traffic congestion, eyewitnesses said.

- The showroom had the approval to use only 250W batteries for vehicles with a maximum speed of 25 kmph. However the RTO officials found that they were installing batteries with higher capacities on the vehicles, police said.

Even though the exact cause of the fire is yet to be confirmed, investigators suspect a short circuit, **Salar News** was told. The exact estimation of loss is yet to be calculated.

Officials from the Regional Transport Office (RTO) inspected the showroom last week and highlighted several safety and security lapses.

The showroom had the approval to use only 250W batteries for vehicles with a maximum speed of 25 kmph. However the RTO officials found that they were installing batteries with higher capacities on the vehicles, police said.

In November 2024, a fire broke out in an EV showroom on Dr Rajkumar Road, which took the life of a 20-year-old woman.

Over 25 electric bikes were destroyed in the incident, raising serious concerns about safety standards maintained in electric vehicle showrooms. *—Salar News*

The fire department and local police rushed to the spot and doused the flames **PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD**

Oppn cries foul over Waqf Bill, DMK to move SC

Chairman says it considered all amendments in democratic way

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

DMK on Monday said it will move the Supreme Court against the proposed Waqf law once it is passed, soon after the Joint Parliamentary Committee scrutinising the Waqf (Amendment) Bill moved to finalise its report.

DMK MP A Raja, one of the members of the committee headed by BJP's Jagdambika Pal, said their "fight" in the panel's proceedings is "not for the JPC or Parliament" but for the Supreme Court.

Panel head BJP MP Jagdambika Pal, however, rebutted the charges by Oppostion, and said the panel considered all the amendments in a democratic way. The view of the majority prevailed, he said.

PHOTO: PTI

Hitting out at Pal, TMC MP Kalyan Banerjee claimed, "Everything was pre-decided. We were not allowed to say anything. No rules and procedures were followed. We wanted to discuss the amendments clause by clause but were not allowed."

"The chairperson moved the amendments and then declared them without listening to our points. This is a bad day for democracy," he added.

The accepted amendment proposed by BJP MP Brij Lal said that the "state government may by notification designate an officer above the rank of collector" to carry out an inquiry, as per law.

Several Muslim bodies had objected to the authority given to the collector, noting that he was also the head of revenue records, and any inquiry by him might not be impartial.

While the Bill removes the concept of "Waqf by user", where properties could be deemed as Waqf-based solely on their long use for religious purposes, one amendment moved by BJP MP Nishikant Dubey and accepted by the panel made some allowances for such existing facilities.

A large number of tenants, a big chunk of them non-Muslims, living or running shops on properties claimed by the Waqf will be relieved as these assets mostly carry no clear title.

A source said it would benefit, as the Bill envisaged, hundreds of shopkeepers operating in places such as old Delhi from properties left behind by Muslims who left for Pakistan after Partition, and claimed by Waqf. —*PTI*

SHAH AT MAHA KUMBH

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Monday took a dip in the Triveni Sangam here amid the Maha Kumbh. Shah took the dip around 1 pm, performed 'jal aachman' (sipping of holy water) and offered water to the Sun. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath who, along with the seers also accompanied. The leaders continued to take a dip in the water amid criticism from Opposition about it being polluted

PHOTO: PTI

Don't fall into the trap of false promises of (Narendra) Modi. Is poverty ended by taking a dip in the Ganga? Does it fill your stomach? I don't want to question anyone's 'aastha (faith)'. If anyone feels bad, I apologise

-Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress President

SC junks plea against J'khand BJP leader's criminal case

NEW DELHI, 27JAN

The Supreme Court dismissed a plea of the Jharkhand government against the high court's decision quashing criminal cases against state BJP leaders and MP Nishikant Dubey over protests held in Ranchi in 2023, observing that prohibitory orders are misused. A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka and Ujjal Bhuyan said it is not inclined to interfere with the 14 August, 2024 order of the high court and dismissed the appeal. In August last year, the high court said the right of people to hold peaceful protests and demonstrations is a fundamental right, quashing an appeal. The protest was held by the Central and state BJP leaders, in which over 5,000 people participated. —*PTI*

UDF demands govt to withdraw liquor price hike

T'PURAM, 27 JAN

The Opposition Congress-led UDF on Monday alleged a lack of transparency in the recent hike in the prices of some Indian-Made Foreign Liquor brands including wine and beer in Kerala and urged the state government to withdraw its decision. The Kerala State Beverages (M&M Corporation Limited (BEVCO) recently published the revised price list of various liquor brands

Describing the government's decision to increase the liquor price as a "mystery," the UDF accused the state authorities of yielding to the pressure of liquor companies to help them make excessive profit. "There is no transparency in government's decision to hike liquor prices," Leader of Opposition VD Satheesan said. "Increasing the price would not reduce its consumption. It's helping companies exploit the consumers."—*PTI*

PHOTO: X

HC orders notice on DMK leader's pleas in poll code case

CHENNAI, 27 JAN

The Madras High Court on Monday ordered notices to the police on the petitions filed by DMK leader and state Minister RS Rajakannappan, which sought to quash the cases registered against him for allegedly violating the Election code of conduct during the 2021 Assembly polls. Justice P Velmurugan ordered notices, returnable by three weeks, to the Inspectors of Police, across three districts, and Assistant Director of Horticulture, Ramanathapuram and Village Administrative Officer, Sivaganga. The judge posted to February 17, further hearing of the petitions filed by Rajakannappan, the state Minister for Milk and Dairy Development. —*PTI*

NCP minister cracks 'poor district' joke; Ajit, BJP irked

CHENNAI, 27 JAN

Maharashtra NCP minister Narhari Zirwal has drawn flak from his party head Ajit Pawar and BJP cabinet colleague Girish Mahajan for humorously describing Hingoli as a "poor" district. Zirwal, the Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) legislator from Nashik district and a close associate of Deputy Chief Minister Pawar, made the remarks on Sunday while addressing a gathering in Hingoli district, of which he is the guardian minister. The lighthearted remarks by the state Food and Drug Administration (FDA) minister elicited laughter from the audience. However, the comments were not well-received by Pawar and Mahajan. Facing the heat, Zirwal clarified to the media that his comments were about district's condition on various development parameters. —*PTI*

Bihar polls: Nitish's son may join politics

PATNA, 27 JAN

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's son, Nishant Kumar, recently sparked speculation about his potential political entry after making a public appeal for voters to support his father in the upcoming elections.

This has drawn attention to the growing influence of dynastic politics in India. Critics argue that regional parties often struggle to build leadership beyond family lines, relying more on individual charisma than fostering strong organisational structures.

Nitish Kumar's efforts to secure a political legacy, especially amid Janata Dal-United's (JDU) challenges BJP's rising influence. Speculation grew more after a viral video emerged showing Nishant urging the public to support JD(U) while accompanying his father to his ancestral village in Bakhtiyarpur on 17 January to pay tribute to his late grandfather.

PHOTO: ANI

- Critics argue that regional parties often struggle to build leadership beyond family lines relying more on individual charisma

If Nishant enters politics, he could face competition from other political heirs like Tejashwi Yadav of Rashtraiya Janata dal (RJD) and Chirag Paswan of Loktantrik Janata Dal (LJP), appealing to younger voters but risking alienation from those frustrated with dynastic rule. —*Agencies*

Free bus rides among AAP's 15 promises

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

AAP national convenor Arvind Kejriwal on Monday released the party's manifesto, titled "Kejriwal ki Guarantee," promising free travel on the city's public buses and a 50 per cent discount on Metro fares for all school and college students.

Speaking at the manifesto launch, Kejriwal took a swipe at BJP, accusing it of copying AAP's promise-based governance. "We coined the term 'guarantee' first in the country. After us, the BJP stole it, but the difference is, we fulfil our guarantees, and they do not," .

The manifesto outlines 15 guarantees, with Kejriwal promising "robust" job creation for Delhi residents as his first guarantee.

The second guarantee, under the Mahila Samman Yojana, assures monthly financial support of Rs 2,100 for women. For senior citizens, the Sanjeevani Yojana will provide free healthcare facilities.

The fourth guarantee promises to waive outstanding "hiked" water bills, while the fifth guarantee is of round-the-clock supply of clean drinking water to every household in the national capital.

With BJP threatening to disrupt the status quo, the upcoming polls are expected to be a high-stakes battle between the two parties.

Meanwhile, Delhi Chief Minister Atishi accused BJP of resorting to unfair tactics out of desperation, as she claimed that a "historic loss" awaits saffron party. —*PTI*

AAP National Convenor Arvind Kejriwal with Delhi CM Atishi and former MLA Manish Sisodia releases party's manifesto, in New Delhi PHOTO: PTI

ADR report reveals

Richest candidate: BJP's Karnail Singh with assets of Rs 259 crore

Poorest: Ashok Kumar, Independent with assets of Rs 6,586

46% candidates with class 5-12 education

KEY PROMISES

- **Rs 2,100 monthly aid for women:** AAP guarantees Rs 2,100 per month under the 'Mahila Samman Rashi Yojana'.
- **24-hour clean water supply:** AAP promises round-the-clock clean drinking water to every household in Delhi.
- **Free healthcare for senior citizens:** The Sanjeevani Yojana will provide free healthcare to elderly citizens.
- **50% metro fare discount for students:** AAP pledges a 50% fare concession for students on metro rides.
- **Waiver of hiked water bills:** AAP will waive outstanding "hiked" water bills, offering financial relief to Delhi residents.

I have Indian DNA, says Indonesian Prez

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Indonesia has deep civilisational links with India and many Indonesian names come from Sanskrit, the country's President Prabowo Subianto has said, asserting that he has "Indian DNA".

Subianto was the chief guest at India's 76th Republic Day celebrations on Sunday.

Speaking at the banquet hosted by President Droupadi Murmu at Rashtrapati Bhavan, the Indonesian president also referred to his country's cultural links with India, saying he starts dancing whenever he hears Indian music.

"Your (Modi's) commitment to help the marginalised, to help the weakest part of your society, is an inspiration for us...Why not follow a good example. especially when you have many good examples," he said.

"I would like to report to the president, prime minister, vice-president' -- a few weeks ago, I had my genetic sequencing test and my DNA test, and they tell me that I have Indian DNA," he said.m

Meanwhile, Indonesian Navy Chief Admiral Muhammad Ali on Monday held separate talks with his Indian counterpart Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi and Chief of Defence Staff Gen Anil Chauhan focusing on boosting bilateral maritime ties to ensure security and stability in key waterways.

The resolve by the two countries to expand maritime security cooperation came against the backdrop of China's increasing military muscle-flexing in the South China Sea. —*PTI*

EAM EMBARKS ON 3-DAY VISIT TO UAE

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday embarked on a three-day visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to further enhance India's comprehensive strategic partnership with the influential Gulf nation.

The Ministry of External Affairs said Jaishankar will meet the leadership of the UAE to review the close partnership between the two countries.

It said the visit will provide an opportunity to "advance" the India-UAE comprehensive strategic partnership and "add new momentum" to the ties. The two sides are also expected to review the situation in Gaza following the coming into force of the ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas. —*PTI*

Ahead of Chandigarh mayoral polls, Cong councillor joins BJP

CHANDIGARH/ NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Congress councillor Gurbaksh Rawat joined the BJP ahead of the Mayoral election in Chandigarh. Rawat also serves as the leader of the party in the house. The elections are set to take place on 30, January.

With Rawat' shift, the Congress-AAP alliance has 20 councillors, while the BJP has 16, adding to the list of frequent and absurd twists in the elections.

In response to the shift, AAP has moved its councillors to a different hotel in fear that the BJP would influence the votes. An AAP source said that the leaders were asked to surrender their mobile phones.

PHOTO: X

"Party councillors have been moved to a hotel in Ropar as the BJP is trying to approach each one of them and get them on its side." The source said.

Three AAP councillors, unhappy with AAP's Prem Lata candidature refused to go to the hotel, according to sources and were in talks with the BJP.

Meanwhile, the Supreme Court appointed former judge of Punjab and Haryana High Court Justice (retd) Jaishree Thakur as an independent observer for the elections. The bench said it was only concerned with fairness and transparency of the process while it recorded the submissions of both sides.

Last year the Supreme Court ordered the prosecution of a former returning officer Anil Masih, a BJP member, for "serious misdemeanour," after he was caught on camera invalidating eight ballots and delivered a false statement before the court. —*Agencies*

IN AMRITSAR

Ambedkar statue vandalism sparks protests by Dalits

AMRITSAR/ CHANDIGARH, 27 JAN

Dalit bodies held massive protests in Amritsar on Monday against an attempt to vandalise a life-size statue of BR Ambedkar by a man on Republic Day, while Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann asserted that exemplary punishment will be ensured in the matter.

Police on Sunday arrested Akash Singh, a resident of Dharamkot in Punjab's Moga district, for allegedly attempting to damage the Ambedkar statue at the Town Hall on Heritage Street that leads to the Golden Temple.

A video clip purportedly of the incident went viral on social media, in which the man is seen climbing atop the statue using a steel ladder and carrying a hammer. He is seen hitting the statue multiple times with the hammer.

Activists of Valmiki community during a protest following an attempt by a man to vandalise the statue of BR Ambedkar, in Amritsar PHOTO: PTI

A complete "bandh" was observed in the city because of the protest call given by Dalit bodies. The protesters forced shopkeepers to down shutters. Educational institutions were also forced to shut.

A massive protest was held at the busy Bhandari Bridge area, where anti- government slogans were also raised. Opposition leaders condemned the incident as well, with some of them claiming that there could be a "deep-rooted" conspiracy behind it. —*PTI*

UCC is not to target particular religion: CM Dhami

DEHRADUN, 27 JAN

Uttarakhand Chief Minister Singh Dhami defended the Uniform Civil Code saying it is not meant to target any religion.

"It is a constitutional tool to end all legal discriminations in the name of caste, religion or community. It will put an end to all evil social practices like 'Halala' and 'Iddat'," Dhami said.

The UCC does not interfere with the marital rituals of any community, he said, adding that most Islamic countries of the world have implemented such laws.

Denying allegations that by making the registration of live-in relationships mandatory the UCC usurps the privacy of live-in couples, Dhami said it was meant only to protect the lives of women by keeping a digital record of their relationships so that they are not subjected to violence. —*PTI*

U'KHAND GETS INDIA'S 1ST UCC

Uttarakhand on Monday became the first state in India to adopt Uniform Civil Code. A single set of laws will now apply to all citizens, regardless of their religion. Here are a few key rules

- Minimum marriage age: **Men:** 21 yrs. **Women:** 18 yrs.
- Violation will lead to 8 months' jail.
- Polygamy, bigamy are prohibited.
- Marriages must be registered, even if they are solemnised according to religious customs
- Triple talaq outlawed.
- Wife can seek divorce if husband has more than 1 wife or is guilty of rape.
- Live-in relationship must be registered with govt.
- Children from live-in ties considered legitimate.
- Women deserted in live-in entitled to maintenance.
- If any partner is under 21, parent nod is must for live-ins.
- Illegitimate and adopted children kids via surrogacy get equal share.
- Hindu system of 4 generations inheriting ancestral property banned.

PHOTO: X

Coldplay concludes India tour: Will not forget these 2 weeks

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

British band Coldplay concluded its last concert in India as part of the ongoing 'Music of the Spheres World Tour' in Ahmedabad and thanked fans for their love and kindness in the last two weeks. "Thank you, Ahmedabad, thank you India. We'll never forget these two weeks. Your love and kindness will stay with us forever (sic)," Coldplay said on X, hours after regaling the crowd at Ahmedabad's Narendra Modi Stadium on Sunday. Comprising of Chris Martin, Guy Berryman, Jonny Buckland and Will Champion, the band commenced their India tour on January 18 and performed fives shows across Mumbai and Ahmedabad. During the shows, frontman Martin interacted with the audience in Hindi, Marathi, and Gujarati. *—PTI*

Hyderabad student goes missing in boat fire accident

HYDERABAD, 27 JAN

The Hyderabad city police are searching for Ajay, an engineering student, who went missing after a boat he was on caught fire due to fireworks in Hussain Sagar Lake in Hyderabad, police said. The fireworks were displayed as part of the 'Bharat Mata Maha Aarti' programme organised as part of the Republic Day celebrations. Ajay was on the boat along with friends when it caught fire. While his friends were able to make it to safety, Ajay has not been traced so far. Police said crackers were being burst from the boat after the 'Bharat Mata Maha Arti' programme when one firework hit the crackers onboard, leading to the accident. Additionally, a man suffered burn injuries and was rushed to a hospital. The event was organised by Bharat Mata Foundation. *—PTI*

U'khand woman charred to death, 9 houses gutted

DEHRADUN, JAN 27

More than half a dozen houses were gutted and a 75-year-old woman was charred to death in a blaze that broke out in Savni village, Uttarakhand. Nine houses, in which around 16 families resided, were completely destroyed, the state emergency operations centre said. Apart from the nine houses, five adjacent houses had to be razed to prevent the fire from spreading. The woman was identified as Brahma Devi. It took the State Disaster Response Force and fire service personnel several hours to douse the flames. Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami has issued orders to provide all possible help to the affected families. While investigations are underway, it is suspected that an earthen lamp in one of the houses led to the fire. *—PTI*

2 accused in rape acquitted; victim & witnesses missing

THANE, 27 JAN

A court in Maharashtra's Thane district has acquitted two men accused of raping a woman in 2021, observing the victim and other witnesses were not traceable and charges against the accused were not proved. Additional Sessions Judge AS Bhagwat, in his order on 20 January, held the prosecution failed to prove the charges against the accused, Vijay Shetty, 29, and Mohammad Sarvar Abdulla Shah, 39, and they need to be given the benefit of doubt. The prosecution told the court that on 22 May, 2021, the two men forced the victim (age not mentioned in the order) to consume liquor excessively at a room in a building at Sabegaon in Diva area here and allegedly raped her. They also beat up woman, prosecution said. *—PTI*

Do something about snakebites: SC tells Centre

India faces public health crisis due to scarcity of anti-venom

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Supreme Court on Monday observed the issue of snakebites was prevalent "throughout the country" and asked the Centre to take all states on board to "do something" in making available snakebite treatment in medical facilities.

A bench of Justices BR Gavai and SVN Bhatti was hearing a plea that said the country faced a significant public health crisis due to the scarcity of anti-venom, crucial in treating snakebites.

"You can take the states on board. The problem is throughout the country," the bench told the Centre's counsel.

It went on, "You can have a meeting with all the representatives of the states and try to do something. It is not an adversarial litigation."

The Centre's counsel said the government would place on record its steps taken on the issue.

A bench of Justices BR Gavai and SVN Bhatti asks Centre to have a meeting with all the representatives of the states **PHOTO: PTI**

The lawyers of some states said they would file their counter affidavit in the matter following which the bench granted them six weeks and posted the matter after that.

On 13 December last year, the apex court sought responses from the Centre and others on the plea filed by Shailendra Mani Tripathi, an advocate.

The plea sought directions to make available anti-venom and snakebite treatment at health centres, government hospitals and medical colleges to save lives of victims. *—PTI*

SC orders burial of pastor away from village

New Delhi, 27 JAN

Supreme Court on Monday gave a split verdict on the issue of place of burial of a pastor, whose body is lying in a mortuary in Chhattisgarh since 7 January, and directed that he be buried at a designated place for Christian burials. The villagers said a Christian couldn't be buried in their village, be it the village graveyard or a private land. *—PTI*

The High Court had invalidated the appointment of 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff **PHOTO: PTI**

SC told WB school jobs process vitiated

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

The entire selection process for the appointment of 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff in government and aided schools in West Bengal was vitiated due to malpractice and the state wanted to "protect" the illegal appointments, it was argued in the Supreme Court on Monday.

The arguments took place before a bench of Chief Justice Sanjiv Khanna and Justice Sanjay Kumar which was hearing a batch of pleas against the Calcutta High Court's 22 April last year decision.

The high court had invalidated the appointment of 25,753 teachers and non-teaching staff in state-run and state-aided schools of West Bengal.

On 7 May last year, the apex court stayed the high court's order over the appointments made by the state's school service commission (SSC). The top court, however, permitted the CBI to continue with its probe in the matter.

On Monday, the apex court heard arguments, including ones by the lawyers appearing for some of those who moved the high court against the selection process.

The case stemmed from the alleged irregularities in the 2016 recruitment process conducted by the West Bengal SSC. *—PTI*

RG KAR CASE

HC reserves order on WB, CBI pleas

KOLKATA, 27 JAN

The Calcutta High Court on Monday reserved its order on the admission of two appeals, one by the West Bengal government and the other by the CBI, challenging a trial court order which sentenced RG Kar hospital rape-murder convict Sanjay Roy to life imprisonment till death.

Both CBI and state government separately prayed for capital punishment for the convict. The court's division bench, presided by Justice Debangsu Basak, heard both the state government and the CBI, who argued that the 20 January order of the Sealdah sessions court sentencing Roy, the sole convict in the crime, to life imprisonment till death was inadequate.

Representing the CBI, additional solicitor general SV Raju claimed before the bench that only it has the right to move an appeal before the high court on the grounds of inadequacy of sentence since

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

it was the investigation and prosecution agency of the case. He claimed that the state's appeal is not admissible as it has no authority to do so.

Advocate General Kishore Dutta, representing the West Bengal government, submitted that the state can also move an appeal claiming inadequacy of sentence to a convict even if the investigation and prosecution was done by a central agency. *—PTI*

Man dies of suspected GBS, cases now rises to 101 in Pune

PUNE, 27 JAN

A man suspected to have contracted Guillain-Barre Syndrome (GBS) has died in Maharashtra's Solapur district, while the number of cases of the immunological nerve disorder in Pune has crossed 100, health officials said on Monday.

This is possibly the first death in Maharashtra suspected to have been caused by the GBS.

The 40-year-old native of Solapur had come to Pune, where he is suspected to have contracted the disease, according to officials.

"The patient, suffering from symptoms like breathlessness, weakness in lower limbs and diarrhea, was admitted to a private hospital (in Solapur) on 18 January as he was on ventilator support on and off. He died on on Sunday," Solapur Government Medical College Dean Dr Sanjiv Thakur said.

Following his death, the case was referred to the Solapur government hospital. "A primary report has indicated that he had contracted GBS," the official said.

This is possibly the first death in Maharashtra suspected to have been caused by the GBS **PHOTO: FREEPIK**

Dr Thakur said they also performed clinical autopsy to ascertain the exact cause of death, and the primary report indicated the death was caused by the GBS.

The blood samples of the deceased have been sent to the National Institute of Virology in Pune for further examination, he added.

A state health department official earlier in the day said, "The total number of GBS cases in Pune on Sunday increased to 101, comprising 68 males and 33 females. Of these, 16 patients are on ventilator support. One suspected death has been reported in Solapur." *—PTI*

Elderly woman, son hacked to death in Kerala

PALAKKAD, 27 JAN

An elderly woman and her 53-year-old son were hacked to death in broad daylight in this north Kerala district on Monday, police said.

The victims have been identified as 72-year-old Meenakshi, also known as Lakshmi, and her son Sudhakaran. The incident was reported from Pothundi under the Nenmara police station limits at 10am. Both of them were allegedly hacked to death outside their residence.

Police suspect Chenthamara, 57, their neighbour who was released on bail after being jailed for allegedly killing Sudhakaran's wife a few years ago, to have committed crime.

Lakshmi was allegedly attacked when she tried to prevent Chenthamara from attacking Sudhakaran. While Sudhakaran died on the spot, his mother passed away on way to hospital, police said.

Chenthamara had been harbouring animosity towards Sudhakaran's family, as he believed that his wife and children left him due to the family's interference. *—PTI*

Agra express train escapes after safety lapse

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Alleged negligence of the safety department almost led to an accident in the Railways' Agra division on 22 January after the Lalgarh Superfast Express loco pilot failed to observe the caution speed between the Kitham and the Farah stations.

"Departmental action has been taken against the staff responsible," an Agra division spokesperson said, without providing details of the action taken.

Sources said a speed restriction of 20 kilometres per hour was imposed due to a rail fracture between Kitham and Farah and all trains passing through were supposed to maintain that speed.

PHOTO: ANI

"The train crew is not at fault as the departments concerned, such as the train controller and the station master, didn't alert them of the caution speed," the sources said.

The Railways imposes speed restrictions for safe operation of trains for various reasons -- track condition, track repair work, old railway bridges and station yard remodelling, among others. *—PTI*

Delhi women's body found in suitcase; 3 held

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

A 25-year-old woman's charred body was found stuffed in a suitcase in east Delhi, with police arresting her cousin and his accomplice for killing her after she allegedly pressured him to leave his family and live with her, officials said on Monday.

The burnt body was found packed inside a suitcase lying by the roadside near Shivaji Road between Ambedkar Chowk and Kerala Public School, on the intervening night of Saturday and Sunday, police said.

Police have arrested, Amit Tiwari, 22, a taxi driver, and his cousin Anuj Kumar, 20, a welder, residents of Khora Colony in Ghaziabad, Deputy Commissioner of Police (DCP) (East) Abhishek Dhania said.

- According to police, the victim Shilpa Pandey, had been pressuring Amit, to leave his family and live with her permanently. She had also allegedly threatened to falsely implicate him and his family if he refused

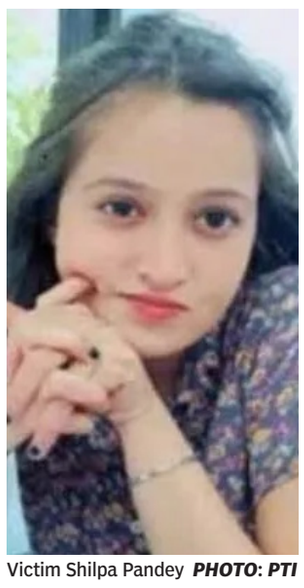
According to police, the victim Shilpa Pandey, had been pressuring Amit, to leave his family and live with her permanently. She had also allegedly threatened to falsely implicate him and his family if he refused.

Unable to cope with these demands the two accused conspired to murder her. After committing the murder, they burned her body and disposed of it inside a suitcase to destroy evidence, the DCP said.

He said to destroy the evidence Amit purchased petrol and stubble.

The accused placed the suitcase containing the body in an isolated area because of high security in Delhi due to assembly elections of and set it on fire, using the stubble.

An FIR was registered at Ghazipur police station and formed multiple teams under the supervision of Additional DCP Vinit Kumar and DCP Abhishek Dhania. *—PTI*



Victim Shilpa Pandey **PHOTO: PTI**

MAHA KUMBH MELA

VHP flags steep hike in Prayagraj flights

VHP national spokesperson Vinod Bansal **PHOTO: ANI**

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

The Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP) on Monday claimed devotees were facing "serious inconveniences" in visiting the Maha Kumbh Mela because of the "exorbitant hike" in fares for flights to Prayagraj by some airlines and urged the government to take immediate steps to address the issue.

Vinod Bansal, the VHP national spokesperson, said while the UP government is taking full care of providing security and facilities to the devotees, many religious, social and philanthropic organisations, as well as people, are engaged in selfless service for the convenience of the devotees visiting at Kumbh Mela.

"But, some airline companies are resorting to an exorbitant hike in airfare, taking unfair advantage of the increasing number of passengers. They have increased their economy class fares by 200 per cent to 700 per cent, because of which the devotees visiting Maha Kumbh and returning from there are facing serious inconveniences," he said in a statement.

> **They have increased their economy class fares by 200 per cent to 700 per cent, because of which the devotees visiting Maha Kumbh and returning from there are facing serious inconveniences**
>
> -Vinod Bansal, VHP spokesperson

Bansal said the Indian Railways has expanded its services for pilgrims going to Maha Kumbh and returning to their homes and kept its fares limited. Yet the devotees are facing difficulties because railway tickets are not available to many due to an increased footfall of passengers. Such people are unable to buy air tickets because of an exorbitant hike in the airfare by some airlines, he said.

"This is completely unfair and unethical," Bansal said.

This is an occasion to offer hospitality, show dedication and provide a respectful reception to the devotees visiting Maha Kumbh for pilgrimage. "In such a situation, airlines should limit their fares and pay special attention to expanding services and convenience to the passengers," Bansal said. *—PTI*

Tiger that killed woman found dead

WAYANAD, 27 JAN

A man-eater tiger that killed a woman when she had gone to collect coffee beans in a forest-fringed estate two days ago, was found dead in Kerala's high-range district of Wayanad in the early hours of Monday, forest officials said.

The incident triggered widespread protests, forcing the state government to declare the tiger as a man-eater on Sunday and schedule it for killing.

An autopsy on the dead cat revealed the presence of the victim's hair, dress, and a pair of earrings in its stomach, forest officials said.

After a post-mortem was carried out later in the day, forest officials said that the fresh, deep wounds found on the neck of the carcass were the cause of its death. After verifying the stripe pattern of the carcass, officials confirmed that it was the same tiger that killed Radha, a 46-year-old woman, on Saturday and triggered widespread scare.

Chief Conservator of Forest (CCF) Northern Circle, KS Deepa, said that an attempt was made to tranquilise the big cat in the wee hours of Monday, but it didn't succeed.

It might have happened when the tiger engaged in a territorial infight with another big cat at a time it was forced to go into the deep forest here after the wildlife personnel intensified their search on Sunday, he said.

An expert panel of experienced doctors carried out the post-mortem, and representatives of the public, along with police personnel, were present during the procedure as per protocol, he said.

Forest Minister A K Saseendran, who faced the heat of protest by local people on Sunday when he visited the family of Radha, said the death of the big cat was news of relief for the people. *—PTI*

GALAXY BIGGER THAN MILKY WAY

Astronomers have discovered Inkathazo, a giant radio galaxy with plasma jets spanning 3.3 million light-years, using South Africa's MeerKAT telescope. The discovery, challenging existing plasma physics models, highlights the immense size of the galaxy, 32 times larger than the Milky Way and provides new insights into the nature of these extreme cosmic phenomena
PHOTO: THE CONVERSATION

Palestinians face wreckage in Gaza's 'ghost towns'

Palestinians in Gaza are confronting an apocalyptic landscape of devastation after a ceasefire paused more than 15 months of fighting between Israel and Hamas.

Across the tiny coastal enclave, where built-up refugee camps are interspersed between cities, drone footage captured by The Associated Press shows mounds of rubble stretching as far as the eye can see — remnants of the longest and deadliest war between Israel and Hamas in their blood-ridden history.

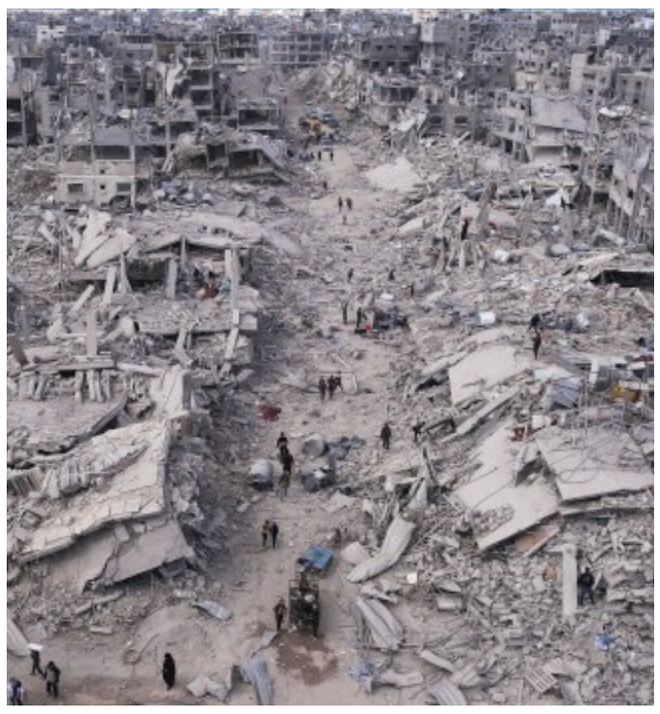
"As you can see, it became a ghost town," said Hussein Barakat, 38, whose home in the southern city of Rafah was flattened. "There is nothing," he said, as he sat drinking coffee on a brown armchair perched on the rubble of his three-storey home, in a surreal scene.

Critics say Israel has waged a campaign of scorched earth to destroy the fabric of life in Gaza, accusations that are being considered in two global courts, including the crime of genocide. Israel denies those charges and says its military has been fighting a complex battle in dense urban areas and that it tries to avoid causing undue harm to civilians and their infrastructure.

Military experts say the reality is complicated.

"For a campaign of this duration, which is a year's worth of fighting in a heavily urban environment where you have an adversary that is hiding in amongst that environment, then you would expect an extremely high level of damage," said Matthew Savill, director of military sciences at the Royal United Services Institute, a British think-tank.

Savill said that it was difficult to draw a broad conclusion about the nature of Israel's campaign. To do so, he said, would require each strike and operation to be assessed to determine whether they adhered to the laws of armed conflict and whether all were proportional, but he did not think the scorched earth description was accurate.



Critics say Israel has waged a campaign of scorched earth to destroy the fabric of life in Gaza, accusations that are being considered in two global courts
PHOTO: PTI

International rights groups. including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch, view the vast destruction as part of a broader pattern of extermination and genocide directed at Palestinians in Gaza, a charge Israel denies. The groups dispute Israel's stance that the destruction was a result of military activity.

Human Rights Watch, in a November report accusing Israel of crimes against humanity, said "the destruction is so substantial that it indicates the intention to permanently displace many people."

From a fierce air campaign during the first weeks of the war, to a ground invasion that sent thousands of troops in on tanks, the Israeli response to a Hamas-led attack on October 7, 2023, has ground down much of the civilian infrastructure of the Gaza Strip, displacing 90 per cent of its population.

The brilliant colour of pre-war life has faded into a monotone cement gray that dominates the territory. It could take decades, if not more, to rebuild.

Airstrikes throughout the war toppled buildings and other structures said to be housing militants. But the destruction intensified with the ground forces, who fought Hamas fighters in close combat in dense areas.

If militants were seen firing from an apartment building near a troop maneuver, forces might take the entire building down to thwart the threat. Tank tracks chewed up paved roads, leaving dusty stretches of earth in their wake.

The military's engineering corps was tasked with using bulldozers to clear routes, downing buildings seen as threats, and blowing up Hamas' underground tunnel network.

Experts say the operations to neutralise tunnels were extremely destructive to surface infrastructure. For example, if a 1.5-kilometre tunnel was blown up by Israeli forces, it would not spare homes or buildings above, said Michael Milshtein, a former Israeli army intelligence officer.

Cemeteries, schools, hospitals and more were targeted and destroyed, he said, because Hamas was using these for military purposes. Secondary blasts from Hamas explosives inside these buildings could worsen the damage.

The way Israel has repeatedly returned to areas it said were under its control, only to have militants overrun it again, has exacerbated the destruction, Savill said.

That's evident especially in northern Gaza, where Israel launched a new campaign in early October that almost obliterated Jabaliya, a built up, urban refugee camp. Jabaliya is home to the descendants of Palestinians who fled, or were forced to flee, during the war that led to Israels creation in 1948. Milshtein said Israel's dismantling of the tunnel network is also to blame for the destruction there.

But the destruction was not only caused from strikes on targets. Israel also carved out a buffer zone about a kilometre inside Gaza from its border with Israel, as well as within the Netzarim corridor that bisects north Gaza from the south, and along the Philadelphi Corridor, a stretch of land along Gaza's border with Egypt. Vast swaths in these areas were levelled. Amir Avivi, a retired Israeli general, said the buffer zones were an operational necessity meant to carve out secure plots of land for Israeli forces. He denied Israel had cleared civilian areas indiscriminately.

The destruction, like the civilian death toll in Gaza, has raised accusations that Israel committed war crimes, which it denies. The decisions the military made in choosing what to topple, and why, are an important factor in that debate. *—PTI*

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

SALAR سالار

Protests & unrest likely after S Korea's Yoon's indictment

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol has become the country's first leader to be indicted, less than two weeks after he was the first to be detained.

The impeached, jailed president, who had been holed up in his presidential compound for weeks after issuing a shocking martial law decree last month, now faces rebellion charges that are punishable by the death penalty or life in prison.

It's part of a tortuous saga that has plunged South Korea into political turmoil and further riven an already divided society.

And it's not the only legal headache Yoon faces. A separate proceeding will determine whether to formally dismiss Yoon as president or reinstate him.

As Seoul prepares for double court hearings, continuing chaotic protests and increasingly harsh rhetoric from pro-and anti-Yoon forces, here's what to expect next:

What happens now?
Yoon will stay in jail.
He will be brought from a detention facility to a Seoul court for hearings in the rebellion trial, which is expected to last about six months.

Prosecutors say that Yoon directed a rebellion when he briefly imposed martial law on 3 December.

Yoon has presidential immunity from most criminal prosecutions, but not on charges of rebellion or treason.

Yoon's defense minister, police chief and several other military commanders have already been arrested and indicted on alleged rebellion, abuse of power and other charges related to the martial law decree.

Meanwhile, rival protests look likely to continue in downtown Seoul.

After a local court on 19 January approved a formal arrest warrant to extend Yoon's detention, dozens of his supporters stormed the court building, destroying windows, doors and other property. They also attacked police officers with bricks, steel pipes and other objects. The violence left 17 police officers injured, and police detained 46 protesters.

What about his other court case?
Yoon also has to worry about the Constitutional Court, which has until June to determine whether to formally dismiss or reinstate him as president.

Observers expect a ruling to come sooner than the deadline.

In the cases of two past impeached presidents, Roh Moo-hyun in 2004 and Park Geun-hye in 2016, the court spent 63 days and 91 days respectively before determining to reinstate Roh and dismiss Park.

If the Constitutional Court removes Yoon from office, an election to choose his successor must be held within two months.

Recent public surveys show that governing and opposition party candidates are running neck-and-neck in a possible presidential by-election race.

How are the two camps taking the indictment?
Shin Dong-wook, a spokesperson for the governing conservative People Power Party, is warning that prosecutors will face unspecified legal and political consequences for their "wrong indictment" of Yoon.

Yoon's defense team says the prosecutors who indicted the president are trying to curry favor with political forces who want Yoon gone. They called the indictment "a shame in the history of South Korean prosecutors."

The main opposition liberal Democratic Party, which led Yoon's Dec. 14 impeachment, called his indictment and arrest "the beginning of the punishment of the ringleader of a rebellion."

Party spokesperson Han Min-soo warned Yoon to stop what he called his attempt to incite far-right supporters based on "groundless delusion."

The martial law imposition, the first of its kind in South Korea in more than four decades, lasted only six hours. But it evoked painful memories of the military-backed rulers who used martial law and emergency decrees to suppress opponents in the 1960s through the '80s. *—PTI*

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol has become the country's first leader to be indicted, less than two weeks after he was the first to be detained
PHOTO: PTI

US intelligence sharing with allies at risk under Trump's leadership

As Russia moved closer to invading Ukraine nearly three years ago, the United States and its allies took the extraordinary step of declassifying and sharing intelligence to expose Moscow's plans.

Information flew across the Atlantic from US spy agencies to NATO and Western partners showing that Russia was poised to launch the biggest attack on a European country since World War II.

It was designed to muster support for Kyiv, and on the strength of the US warning, some nations sent weapons to Ukraine, which moved some equipment out of the range of Russian strikes.

Now, officials are bracing for a potentially changed security landscape under President Donald Trump. He has criticised America's allies and lambasted its intelligence agencies. He's been accused of disregarding secrecy rules and hoarding classified documents.

Tulsi Gabbard, Trump's pick for director of national intelligence, has parroted Russian propaganda while his nominee to lead the FBI, Kash Patel, has promised changes that could significantly curtail the flow of intelligence to America's friends. Both are expected to face sharp questioning from lawmakers during confirmation hearings Thursday.

The Associated Press spoke with 18 current and former senior European and U.S. officials who worked in NATO, defense, diplomacy or intelligence. Many raised questions and concerns about Trump's past relationship with America's spies and their ability to share information at a time of heightened terror threats and signs of greater cooperation between US adversaries.

The importance of trust'
The US and its allies routinely share top-secret information, be it about potential terror threats, Chinese cyberattacks or Russian troop movements. America's closest intelligence partners are New Zealand, Australia, Canada and Britain, and it often shares with other nations or sometimes even adversaries when lives are at stake.

In July, the US helped foil a Russian plot to assassinate the head of a German arms manufacturer that produced weapons for Ukraine. In August, the CIA said it provided intelligence to Austrian authorities that allowed them to disrupt a plan, allegedly inspired by the Islamic State group, to attack a Taylor Swift concert in Vienna.

Officials are bracing for a potentially changed security landscape under President Donald Trump ***PHOTOS: PTI***

Cooperation particularly between the US and the UK is "strong and robust enough to withstand some turbulence at the political level," said Lord Peter Ricketts, former UK national security adviser and current chair of the European Affairs Committee of the upper chamber of the British Parliament.

However, any strong intelligence relationship is underpinned by trust, and what if "trust isn't there?" Ricketts said.

There was some skepticism about US intelligence ahead of the invasion of Ukraine due to the faulty American information that led to the invasion of Iraq in 2001, said Oana Lungescu, a fellow at the Royal United Services Institute in London and formerly NATO's longest-serving spokesperson.

But when combined with information from its security partners, America's "remarkable intelligence" enabled the NATO alliance to raise the alert about Russia, Lungescu said.

European leaders are working to convince Trump's administration that threats on the continent also are relevant for the United States.

Predicting Trump's moves, however, is difficult. He has criticized NATO allies for not spending enough on defense. He even suggested he would encourage Russia to invade countries that didn't pay what he thought they should. But he didn't follow through on the threat.

NATO members have hiked their defense spending — as Trump has demanded — and the alliance is now bigger than before, with Sweden and Finland joining after Russia invaded Ukraine.

Concerns about Trump's intel picks
Trump's choice of Gabbard to oversee more than a dozen intelligence agencies has alarmed lawmakers from both parties and many current and former intelligence officials.

Gabbard, a former Democratic congresswoman who later became a Trump ally, met since-deposed Syrian President Bashar Assad in 2017 in Damascus and has promoted Russian propaganda about its invasion of Ukraine.

If confirmed, Gabbard would have the power to declassify information and direct some intelligence sharing with allies.

A European intelligence official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive matters, said that while there is concern around some of Trump's nominations, there is "no reason to think we can't trust them because of who is in power."

The task for Europe is to convince everybody to focus on Russia, "the real troublemaker," the intelligence official said.

The United States shared intelligence gathered through that law with Russia when public safety was at stake, passing along a warning before a deadly concert attack in Moscow in March that killed 145 people. It is not clear if Moscow tried to act on the warning.

Allies heavily depend on US intelligence
Many global tech and communication firms such as Google, Apple and Microsoft as well as Elon Musk's X are based in the US, giving American law enforcement and spy agencies an advantage over their foreign counterparts, which may lack the political or legal means to obtain information. *—PTI*

Israel lets Palestinians re-enter northern Gaza after a year

Displaced Palestinians return to their homes in the northern Gaza Strip on Monday PHOTO: PTI

DEIR AL-BALAH, 27 JAN

Israel on Monday began allowing Palestinians to return to the heavily destroyed northern part of the Gaza Strip for the first time since the early weeks of the 15-month war with Hamas, in accordance with a fragile ceasefire.

Thousands of Palestinians headed north after waiting for days to cross. People crossed the so-called Netzarim corridor shortly after 7am when the checkpoints were scheduled to open.

The opening was delayed for two days over a dispute between Hamas and Israel, which said the mili-tant group had changed the order of the hostages it released in exchange for hundreds of Palestinian prisoners. Mediators resolved the dispute overnight.

Israel had delayed the opening of the crossing, saying it would not do so until a female civilian hos-tage, Arbel Yehoud, was released. It also accused Hamas of failing to provide information on whether the remaining hostages set to be freed in the first phase are alive or dead.

Hamas in turn accused Israel of violating the agreement by not opening the crossing.

The Gulf nation of Qatar, a key mediator with Hamas, announced early Monday that an agreement had been reached to release Yehoud along with two other hostages before Friday. —PTI

TROOP WITHDRAWAL DELAYED

The White House on Sunday said in a statement that "the arrangement between Lebanon and Israel, monitored by the United States, will continue to be in effect until February 18, 2025." It added that the respective governments "will also begin negotiations for the return of Lebanese prisoners captured after October 7, 2023". —PTI

People crossed the Netzarim corridor shortly after 7am on Monday, when the checkpoints were scheduled to open PHOTO: PTI

Protests in 110 Greek cities over 2023 rail crash

ATHENS, 27 JAN

Tens of thousands of Greeks took to the streets in 110 cities Sunday, including 13 locations abroad, to demand justice for the 57 victims of the country's deadliest rail disaster in 2023. The largest marches, with about 30,000 taking part in each, took place in Greece's two largest cities, Athens and Thessaloniki. They were mostly peaceful, although in each city, small groups of people attacked police forces with rocks and flares. Police responded with tear gas and flash-bang grenades. The clashes only lasted a few minutes. The marchers accused the government of hiding significant evidence, running an opaque investigation and trying to blame the disaster on a stationmaster's bad decisions. The disaster happened on 28 February, 2023 when a north-bound passenger train collided with a southbound freight train, which had been placed mistakenly on the same track. —PTI

PHOTO: X

Heir to ₹2,500cr empire gets life in prison for murder

LONDON, 27 JAN

The heir to a Rs 2,500 crore pie company was sentenced to life in prison for the "barbaric and cruel" murder of his best friend on Christmas Eve in the house they shared in Llandaff, Cardiff. Dylan Thomas, 24, stabbed the 23-year-old William Bush 37 times using a large kitchen knife in 2023. Thomas, had reportedly researched the anatomy of the neck just hours before launching the assault with a kitchen knife. Jurors took merely three hours in November to convict him of murder. Thomas, who is the grandson of Peter's Pie Services founder Sir Stanley Thomas, was found guilty in November and has been undergoing treatment for schizophrenia and psychosis, BBC reported. Thomas will serve at least 19 years in prison. —Agencies

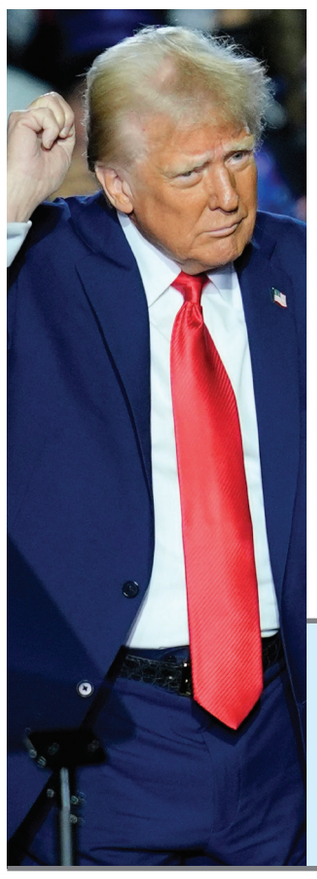
N Dakota's ban on gender-affirming care heads to trial

BISMARCK, 27 JAN

A lawsuit seeking to strike down North Dakota's ban on gender-affirming medical care for minors will go to trial on Monday, more than a year after families of transgender children and a doctor filed the suit that argued the law violates the state's constitution. North Dakota is one of more than two dozen states that have banned gender-affirming care. Like North Dakota, many of those states have faced court challenges to the laws. Court rulings have significantly reduced the scope of the North Dakota case. Earlier this month, a state district judge dismissed from the case some of the claims as well as the children and families who were plaintiffs, leaving only a pediatric endocrinologist as a plaintiff. The trial in Bismarck may last eight days. It's unclear when the judge will rule. —PTI

Trump admin freezes foreign aid for review

The move is a part of America First agenda



WASHINGTON, 27 JAN

United States has announced the suspension of all foreign aid and ordered the review of American financial assistance to other countries, to ensure they are efficient and consistent with its foreign policy under the America First agenda.

The move comes after President Donald Trump signed an executive order in this regard. State Department Spokesperson Tammy Bruce said Secretary of State Marco Rubio has paused all US foreign assistance funded by or through the State Department and US Agency for International Development (USAID) for review.

She added that the secretary is proud to protect America's investment with a deliberate and judicious review of how to spend foreign assistance dollars overseas.

"The mandate from the American people was clear – we must refocus on American national interests. The Department and USAID take their role as stewards of tax-payer dollars very seriously," Bruce said.

The implementation of Trump's Executive Order in this egard and the secretary's direction furthers that mission, she added.

Bruce reminded reporters Rubio's words: "Every dollar we spend, every programme we fund and every policy we pursue must be justified with the answer to three simple questions: Does it make Ameri-ca safer? Does it make America stronger? Does it make America more prosperous?" —INTERNATIONAL WASHINGTON

US tariffs force Petro accept migrants back

Colombia takes U-turn after denying entry

WASHINGTON, 27 JAN

The US has paused sanctions and tariffs on Colombia after it agreed to accept all the terms of President Donald Trump, including accepting flights of deported migrants from America, the White House said.

"The Government of Colombia has agreed to all of President Trump's terms, including the unrestricted acceptance of all illegal aliens from Colombia returned from the United States, including on US military aircraft, without limitation or delay," White House Press Secretary Karolina Leavitte said late Sunday night.

Earlier, Colombian President Petro denied entry to US military planes carrying Columbian mi-grants, which angered Trump.

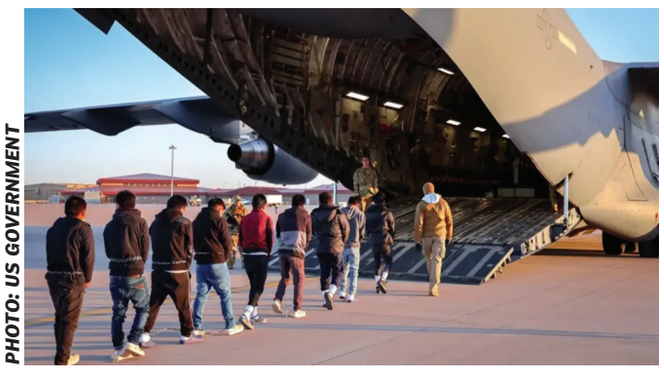


PHOTO: US GOVERNMENT

Trump's press secretary Karoline Leavitt posted this picture on X on 24 January, announcing that deportation flights had begun

The US President ordered visa restrictions and 25 per cent tariffs on all Colombian goods, which would be raised to 50 per cent in one week.

The Office Petro immediately responded, saying it has arranged for the presidential plane to facilitate the "dignified return of Colombian nationals who were to arrive in the country today in the morning, coming in from deportation flights." —PTI

Jordan unlikely to accept more Palestinian refugees

DORAL, 27 JAN

President Donald Trump's push to have Egypt and Jordan take in large numbers of Palestinian refugees from besieged Gaza fell flat with the Amman government and perplexed a Congressional ally.

Trump said he told Jordan's King Abdullah when they held a call earlier Saturday, "I'd love for you to take on more because I'm looking at the whole Gaza Strip right now, and it's a mess.'"

The US president said he would make a similar appeal to Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sissi during their conversation while Trump was at his Doral resort in Florida.

Trump said he would "like Egypt to take people and I'd like Jordan to take people."

The authorities in Egypt and Jordan, along with the Palestinians, worry that Israel would never allow them to return to Gaza once they have left. —PTI

Russia claims capture of Ukrainian town

KYIV, 27 JAN

Russia on Sunday claimed its troops had captured a strategically important town in eastern Ukraine as part of a grinding campaign to weaken Kyiv's grip on the country's industrial heartland.

Russia's defense ministry announced the fall of Velyka Novosilka, which had around 5,000 residents be-fore the war, following a months-long battle. Its statement could not be independently verified, and Ukraine claimed its troops had only strategically withdrawn from certain areas.

Ukrainian forces are still struggling to defend their strongholds even after NATO's heavy supplies of weapons PHOTO: X

However, if confirmed, it would make Velyka Novosilka the first key town to capitulate in 2025 under Moscow's onslaught in the eastern Donetsk region against Ukraine's short-handed army.

Ukrainian forces withdrew from certain parts of Velyka Novosilka to avoid encirclement, the 110th Separate Mechanized Brigade said in a statement on its official Telegram channel Sunday. The brigade is active in that patch of the frontline.

Analysts have long predicted it's only a matter of time until Russian forces capture the settlement, which lies only 15 kilometers from the neighbouring Dnipropetrovsk region.

The brigade said though they have approximate parity with Russian forces in terms of artillery and drones, the Russians have a huge advantage in manpower.

"Our units, using the weather conditions, skilfully withdrew from areas where there was a threat of encirclement. This does not mean that we have completely left the city, the fighting in Velyka Novosilka continues," the statement said. —PTI

People fleeing M-23 rebel advances arrive by boat in Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo, on Wednesday PHOTO: PTI

Congo calls it 'war' as rebels take major city

GOMA, 27 JAN

Rwanda-backed rebels claimed they captured eastern Congo's largest city, Goma, on Monday as the United Nations (UN) described a "mass panic" among its 2M people and Congo's government said the rebel advance was a "declaration of war".

The M23 rebels announced the city's capture minutes before expiry of their 48-hour deadline for the Congolese army to surrender their weapons. Early Monday morning, gunfire was heard throughout the city, according to two aid workers sheltering there who were not authorised to speak to the media.

In a statement, the rebels urged residents of Goma to remain calm and for members of the Congolese military to assemble at the central stadium.

The M23 rebels' offensive in the heart of the mineral-rich region threatens to dramatically worsen one of Africa's longest wars and further displace civilians. According to a UN report, over a third of the popula-tion of North Kivu province where Goma is located are currently displaced and the capture of Goma will likely exacerbate the situation.

Late Sunday night, UN peacekeepers began to process members of the military who had begun to sur-render on the outskirts of the city.

Congolese government spokesman Patrick Muyaya, in a video posted on X, called for the protection of civilians and said the country is "in a war situation where the news is changing". —PTI

Jeju Air crash probe finds bird strike signs

SEOUL, 27 JAN

The first report on last month's Jeju Air crash in South Korea confirmed bird strikes in the plane's engines, though officials haven't determined the cause of the accident that killed all but two of the 181 people on board.

The preliminary accident report released on Monday said feathers and bird blood stains were found in both engines.

"The samples were sent... for DNA analysis, and a domestic organisation identified them as belonging to Baikal Teals," the report said, referring to a migratory duck.

The report also said the plane's black box stopped recording about four minutes before the crash.

- A set of antennas on a concrete structure at the runway's end that guide aircraft during landings – likely made the crash of the Jeju Air plane worse, some experts have said

Some experts have said that Muan International Airport's localiser – a set of antennas on a concrete structure at the runway's end that guide aircraft during landings – likely made the crash of the Jeju Air plane worse.

The Boeing 737-800 skidded off the airport's runaway on 29 December after its landing gear failed to deploy, slamming into the concrete structure and bursting into flames.

Investigators have said that air traffic controllers had warned the pilot about possible bird strikes two minutes before the aircraft issued a distress signal confirming that a bird strike had occurred, after which the pilot attempted an emergency landing. —PTI

Sweden seizes Malta vessel after cable damage

RIGA, 27 JAN

Swedish prosecutors announced Sunday night that they have opened a preliminary investigation into suspected aggravated "sabotage" and ordered the detention of a vessel in the Baltic Sea suspected of damaging an underwater fibre optic cable connecting Latvia and the Swedish island of Gotland earlier that day.

Swedish newspaper Expressen identified the vessel as the Malta-flagged Vezhen. —PTI

AI FIRM'S BID FOR TIKTOK MERGER COULD GIVE US GOVT 50% STAKE

WASHINGTON, 27 JAN

Perplexity AI has presented a new proposal to TikTok's parent company that would allow the US government to own up to 50 per cent of a new entity that merges Perplexity with TikTok's US business, a source said.

The proposal, submitted last week, is a revision based on Trump administration's feedback on a prior plan the start-up had presented to TikTok's parent ByteDance on 18 January, a day before the ban on TikTok.

The first proposal, which ByteDance hasn't responded to, suggested a new structure that would merge San Francisco-based Perplexity with TikTok's US business and include other investors. —PTI

SLEAZY BUSINESS

Tycoons spent ₹10cr on orgies at Davos: Report

DAVOS, 27 JAN

Over 3,000 top business tycoons, academics, and world leaders gathered at the Davos in Switzerland last week for the annual meeting of the World Economic Forum (WEF). But as the tycoon flocked to the Swiss town, escort agencies saw heightened demand during the event with prostitutes being made to sign non-disclosure agreements, reported Daily Mail.

The report claimed that some of the most powerful names in business organised orgies at Davos, booking several women at once.

Some women reportedly make around Rs 6.5 lakh per booking – with some guests even paying for several hours of 'company'.

The average booking duration at these events was approximately four hours,

The Daily Mail reported some powerful names in business organised orgies, booking several women at once

resulting in an estimated Rs 2.9 crore spent on bookings from just one website.

Titt4tat's Andreas Berger told MailOnline that there had been "significantly more sex parties" this year – with 300 escorts booked from its platform by just around 90 customers. The spokesperson said that the WEF guests were likely to have spent around 1 million CHF (nearly Rs 10 lakh) when one took other providers and agencies into consideration. —Agencies

Geopolitical tensions drag markets down

3,522 stocks declined while 593 advanced; Infosys, Tata Steel, HDFC, RIL among laggards

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Benchmark BSE Sensex tanked to a seven-month low on Monday following heavy selling in IT and oil & gas shares amid weak global trends and increased uncertainty over US trade policy.

Geopolitical tensions and continued selling by foreign institutional investors (FII) further hit the sentiment. Mid and small-cap continue to face the brunt of heightened volatility as richer valuations trigger sell-off across the segment.

Among Sensex shares, HCL tech fell the most by 4.49 per cent followed by Zomato, Tech Mahindra, PowerGrid and Tata Motors.

Shares of Infosys, Tata Steel, HDFC Bank, Reliance Industries and Bharti Airtel also declined, dragging the index to more than seven-month lows.

Hindustan Unilever, M&M, SBI and L&T were among the other gainers. The BSE SmallCap gauge declined 3.51 per cent and Midcap index slumped 2.68 per cent.

Among the sectoral indices, telecommunication plummeted the most by 3.83 per cent and Focuses IT by 3.34 per cent. IT (3.31 per cent), Teck (3.04 per cent), Metal (2.86 per cent), Healthcare (2.73 per cent), Industrials (2.63 per cent), Oil & Gas and Commdities (2.42 per cent each) and Utilities (2.41 per cent) also declined.

Going ahead, the market will likely continue to be driven by volatility, as uncertainty over RBI MPC meet in the coming week and the FOMC meet during the current week will likely weigh in on the market, an expert added.

Strong selling in IT, telecom, metals, oil & gas and realty dragged Sensex below the 76k mark, whereas investors continued to exit mid and small-cap stocks on worries that slowdown in earnings will fail to match the higher valuations assigned to them.

Overall market breadth was negative as 3,522 stocks declined while 593 advanced and 119 remained unchanged on the BSE.

The market capitalisation of BSE-listed companies slumped by Rs 9,28,229.09 crore to Rs 4,10,23,624.90 or (USD 4.75 trillion). —*PTI*

Among Sensex shares, HCL tech fell the most by 4.49 per cent followed by Zomato, Tech Mahindra, PowerGrid and Tata Motors **PHOTO: X**

PHOTO: PTI

Gold snaps 8-day rally; falls to ₹83,000 per 10 gm

MUMBAI, 27 JAN

Gold prices slipped Rs 100 to Rs 83,000 per 10 grams, bringing an end to its eight-day rally in the national capital on Monday, amid a weak global trend, according to the All India Sarafa Association. Besides, the US Federal Reserve's (Fed) first meeting of 2025, and the European Central Bank (ECB) will decide on interest rates on Wednesday and Thursday, which could influence the bullion prices. On Friday, gold of 99.9 per cent purity climbed Rs 200 to hit a lifetime high of Rs 83,100 per 10 grams in the national capital. On Monday, the precious metal of 99.5 per cent purity decreased Rs 100 to Rs 82,600 per 10 grams from Friday's closing rate of Rs 82,700 per 10 grams. Meanwhile, silver plunged Rs 2,000 to Rs 92,000 per kg due to reduced offtake by industrial units and coin makers. It had settled at Rs 94,000 per kg on Friday. —*PTI*

Rupee falls 11 paise to close at 86.33 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 27 JAN

The rupee depreciated 11 paise to close at 86.33 (provisional) against the US dollar on Monday, as strong dollar demand and a muted trend in domestic equities weighed on investors' sentiments. Forex traders said the Indian rupee gained on Friday but opened on a lower note on Monday as 'Trump Tariffs' uncertainty gained, while sustained foreign fund outflows dented investor sentiments further. At the interbank foreign exchange, the rupee opened on a weak note at 86.35, and during the day touched a high of 86.33 and a low of 86.45 against the American currency. The local unit settled for the day at 86.33 (provisional), registering a fall of 11 paise over its previous close. —*PTI*

Biocon to raise Rs 570 cr through commercial issuance

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Biocon Ltd on Monday said its board has approved raising Rs 570 crore through issuance of commercial papers on private placement basis. The decision was taken at the company's board meeting, according a regulatory filing by Biocon. Commercial papers are short-term, unsecured debt obligations issued by institutions and corporations as an alternative to costlier methods of funding. In a separate filing, the company said it has achieved an improvement in its Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) scores as assessed by S&P Global's Corporate Sustainability Assessment (CSA) for 2024. The company achieved an S&P Global ESG Score of 69 in 2024, up 6 points from 63 in 2023. This places the company in the 98th percentile among its global biotechnology industry peers, it said. —*PTI*

Canara Bank Q3 profit up 12 pc to ₹4,104 cr

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

State-owned Canara Bank on Monday reported a 12.25 per cent growth in its standalone net profit to Rs 4,104 crore for three months ended December 2024. The bank had posted a net profit of Rs 3,656 crore in the year-ago period. The bank's total income rose by 11.7 per cent to Rs 36,114 crore in the October-December quarter of the current financial year (FY25) against Rs 32,334 crore a year ago, according to a regulatory disclosure made to the stock exchanges. Its Gross Non-Performing Assets (GNPA) ratio improved to 3.34 per cent as of December 2024 from 4.39 per cent as of December 2023. Besides, the net non-performing assets (ratio improved to 0.89 per cent. —*PTI*

IDFC First Bank shares decline 8%; hit 52-week low

Shares of IDFC First Bank declined nearly 8 per cent on Monday morning after the firm posted a 53 per cent decline in net profit at Rs 339 crore for the third quarter ended December 2024 on increased provisions due to higher slippages of loans. The company's stock plunged 7.7 per cent each to hit a 52-week low of Rs 57.45 and Rs 57.46 apiece on both NSE and BSE, respectively. —*PTI*

Adani Wilmar Q3 profit more than doubles to ₹411 crore

Adani Wilmar on Monday posted over twofold jump in consolidated net profit at Rs 410.93 crore for December quarter 2024-25 on strong edible oil sales. The company had logged a net profit of Rs 200.89 crore in the year-ago period. Total income rose to Rs 16,926 crore during the quarter from Rs 12,887.21 crore in the corresponding period of the previous year, according to a regulatory filing. Expenses remained higher at Rs 16,379.76 crore. —*PTI*

SEBI Chief's role up for grab as Buch's term ends

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

The government on Monday initiated the process to find a chairperson of market regulator Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI), a month before the end of tenure of the current chief Madhabi Puri Buch, who was involved in an unsavoury conflict of interest row.

The appointment will be for five years or till the candidate attains 65 years of age, as per the advertisement by the Department of economic Affairs under the Finance Ministry. The last date for filing of applications is 17 February.

The ministry also said that keeping in view the role and importance of SEBI as a regulator, the candidate should have "high integrity, eminence and reputation preferably above 50 years with more than 25 years of professional experience".

Buch, the first woman to lead SEBI, assumed charge at the helm on 2 March, 2022, for a period of three years. She succeeded IAS officer Ajay Tyagi who served as SEBI chief from 1 March, 2017 to 28 February, 2022.

Hindenburg accused Buch and her husband, Dhaval Buch, of investing in offshore entities that were allegedly part of a fund structure in which Vinod Adani -- the elder brother of Adani group founder chairman Gautam Adani -- also had investments. —*PTI*

WHO IS MADHABI PURI BUCH?

Madhabi Puri Buch is the first woman to chair the Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI).She assumed the position on 2 March, 2022, succeeding Ajay Tyagi.

CAREER HIGHLIGHTS:

- Formerly served as a whole-time director of SEBI from 2017 to 2021.
- Has over 30 years of experience in the financial sector.
- Held executive positions at ICICI Bank, including as Executive Director.

EDUCATION:

- Holds a degree in Mathematics.
- MBA from IIM Ahmedabad.

BIG DECISIONS AT SEBI:

- **Sahara Group (2018):** Ordered Sahara Group to return Rs 14,000 crore raised through fully convertible debentures.
- **Insider Trading Investigation (2021):** Investigated CNBC Awaaz journalist Hemant Ghai for insider trading.
- **Deep Industries Case (2021):** Penalised Savla and Ajitkumar for sharing unpublished price-sensitive information on social media.
- **Zee Entertainment Enterprises (2021):** Identified 15 entities engaging in unfair trading practices post results announcements.

CONTROVERSIES:

- Faced allegations of conflict of interest over investments linked to her and her husband, which she denied.
- Hindenburg accused her of taking no action against manipulation claims involving the Adani Group.
- Criticised for reports of a 'toxic work culture' during her tenure.

PHOTO: X

India initiates anti-dumping probe into PVC imports

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

India has initiated a probe into the alleged dumping of PVC paste resin, used to make artificial leather and other technical textiles' products, from the European Union (EU) and Japan, according to a notification.

The commerce ministry's investigation arm, Directorate General of Trade Remedies (DGTR), is probing the dumping as imports are allegedly hurting the margins of the domestic industry.

Chemplast Sanmar Ltd has filed an application seeking the imposition of anti-dumping duty, stating that the cheap imports are causing material injury to the domestic industry.

"On the basis of the duly substantiated written application submitted by the domestic industry and having reached satisfaction based on the prima facie evidence submitted by domestic industry about the dumping of subject goods...the Authority, hereby, initiates an anti-dumping investigation," the DGTR has said in a notification. —*PTI*

Tata Tech seeks increased budget for workforce upskilling

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Ahead of the Union Budget, Tata Technologies on Monday called for increased allocation toward upskilling initiatives aligned with Industry 4.0 to create a future-ready workforce.

In order to achieve India's ambitious goals outlined in the roadmap for a USD 5 trillion economy, the budget should prioritise innovation-driven policies, investments in emerging technologies, and the development of products in India, for India and the world, Tata Technologies CEO & MD Warren said in a statement.

Key growth drivers such as smart manufacturing, AI, digital transformation, and software-defined vehicles (SDVs) require strong government backing through incentives for R&D. —*PTI*

Indian aircraft MRO to grow 50%: Crisil

MUMBAI, 27 JAN

The Indian aircraft maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO)industry is expected to see a 50 per cent topline growth to Rs 4,500 crore in FY26 amid fresh demand triggered by airline operators' expanding fleet size, ratings agency Crisill said on Monday.

The rating agency's study based on three MRO operators, which account for 90 per cent of the industry's revenue, also pointed out that reduction in GST on aircraft components and services not only positions domestic MRO players more competitively with their overseas competitors but also ease working capital blockage.

Indian MRO players typically provide three types of services -- line checks (undertaken before every take off), air frame checks (every 12-18 months which involves grounding the aircraft for 3-4 weeks) and redelivery checks (at the time of expiry of period of 6-7 years).

The fleet of domestic operators is expected to grow by 20-25 per cent by next year, the agency said, and this will be aided by new aircrafts getting added and grounded aircrafts (post engine related issues) resuming operations. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

THREAT TO NVIDIA, GOOGLE

China's DeepSeek AI sparks $1T tech rout

BEIJING, 27 JAN

Chinese artificial intelligence startup DeepSeek's latest AI model sparked a $1 trillion rout in US and European technology stocks, as investors questioned bloated valuations for some of America's biggest companies.

It also put a spotlight on AI chip producer Nvidia Corp., whose shares soared ninefold in the past two years, is on track for its steepest decline in history.

US stock futures plunged during Asian trading hours on Monday, with the Nasdaq 100 dropping 1.9 per cent and S&P 500 futures sliding 1 per cent. Japanese chipmakers also faced heavy losses, with Advantest Corp. shares tumbling 8.6 per cent.

In contrast, Chinese and Hong Kong tech shares surged, driven by optimism surrounding DeepSeek's rapid rise.

The development raises concerns about the dominance of US tech giants like Nvidia, OpenAI, and Google. Hong Kong's Hang Seng Tech Index rose 2 per cent, while Japan's Nikkei 225 futures fell 0.6 per cent, reflecting the market's mixed reaction.

Chinese AI startup DeepSeek has rapidly climbed the ranks to become the top-rated free app on Apple's US App Store as of Monday, just two weeks after its launch. —*Agencies*

DeepSeek's AI model: Low cost, high impact

DeepSeek is a Chinese artificial intelligence (AI) startup that specialises in developing open-source large language models (LLMs) and has gained significant attention for its innovative AI technologies.

COST EFFICIENCY:
Developed at $5.6 million & free for its users including its premium features. It is available in India.

Founding and funding: Founded in 2023 by Liang Wenfeng (40), an entrepreneur

- Funded solely by Wenfeng's quantitative hedge fund, High-Flyer.

Global implications

- **US tech dominance challenged:** Experts suggest DeepSeek disrupts the notion that massive spending is required for AI leadership. Raises questions about the future of US tech giants like Nvidia, OpenAI & Google.

Market impact

- **Chinese stocks surged:** Shanghai Composite (+0.2%), Hang Seng (+0.7%).
- **Japanese chipmakers suffered losses:** Advantest and Disco Corp hit by reduced demand fears.

Pressure on US firms
Key companies like Apple and Microsoft are reporting slower profit growth amid inflated AI valuations.

Flexible workspace operators bullish on growth

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Flexible office space providers are bullish on demand for managed workspace during 2025 as corporates look for agile and cost-effective solutions to reduce overheads.

Many flexible workspace operators are expected to hit capital markets this year to raise funds for the expansion of their businesses.

The overall gross leasing of office spaces across major seven cities hit an all-time high in 2024.

The gross leasing of office space rose 19 per cent to a record 885.2 lakh square feet across eight major cities, according to Cushman & Wakefield. —*PTI*

INDIA MUST FOCUS ON STRATEGIC AUTONOMY IN IP: EPIC FOUNDATION

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

India should move urgently to secure strategic autonomy by building its own IP/products, and create a clear preference for Indian trusted chips for government purchases, in light of new geopolitics and an increasingly "unipolar world", according to Ajai Chowdhry, Founder HCL and Chairman of EPIC Foundation.

India has already made significant strides with the development of RISC-V chip technology at IIT-Madras, eliminating the need to pay license fees, he noted.

"Building on this, we should focus on designing our own chips using RISC-V to safeguard against future sanctions," Chowdhry said in a statement.

India, he said, must create a clear preference for Indian trusted chips for government purchases to help create the market and make startups and others successful.

It has batted for allocating Rs 44,000 crore to the 'Product Nation', with Rs 15,000 crore going toward system products —*PTI*

Rahul to join K'taka Ranji squad against Haryana

BENGALURU, 27 JAN

KL Rahul was named in the Karnataka squad to face table-toppers Haryana in their final league match of the Ranji Trophy Elite Group C, beginning on 30 January. Rahul was given a go-ahead by the BCCI medical team after rehabilitating from an elbow niggle. Many national-team players have already appeared for their respective teams in previous rounds. Rahul is expected to train with the Karnataka squad, led by opener Mayank Agarwal, from Tuesday. A win is mandatory for Karnataka to keep their knockout hopes alive. Squad against Haryana: Mayank Agarwal (captain), KL Rahul, Shreyas Gopal (vice-captain), Devdutt Padikkal, KV Aneesh, R Smaran, KL Shrijith (wk), Abhinav Manohar, Hardik Raj, Prasidh Krishna, Vidwath Kaverappa, Vasuki Koushik, Abhilash Shetty, Yashovardhan Parantap, Nikin Jose, Sujay Sateri (wk), Mohsin Khan. —*PTI*

Marseille mayor flays 'racist' banner during game

MARSEILLE, 27 JAN

Marseille mayor Benoît Payan has condemned the offensive banners displayed by Nice supporters during Sunday night's match against Marseille and called on French league (LFP) officials to take action. "Racist remarks cannot be tolerated in a stadium. I'm asking the LFP not to let this happen," Payan wrote on X, adding to his message a picture of the a which read "The sun is setting on the city of Nice... let the rat hunt begin." According to French media reports, another banner targeted former Nice player Neal Maupay, who played for the club for eight years before joining Marseille. The match was also stopped briefly in the first half when Nice supporters were asked to stop their homophobic chanting. Nice won the match 2-0. —*PTI*

Ahlawat finishes T-27 at Ras Al Khaimah

RAS AL KHAIMAH, 27 JAN

Indian golfer Veer Ahlawat sunk in three birdies in the last six holes to compile a 3-under 69 in the final round that helped him finish Tied 27th at the Ras Al Khaimah Championship, here. The 28-year-old DLF Golf Academy golfer, had rounds of 70-69-73-69 to finish 7-under for the week and Tied-27th which should boost his confidence after missing the cut a week earlier in Dubai. Ahlawat, who found his way into the DP World Tour by topping the PGTI Order of Merit, was relieved to have made the cut and finish in Top-30. Meanwhile, Alejandro del Rey stormed to a four-stroke victory as he claimed his maiden DP World Tour title.—*PTI*

National Games: IOA sets up helpline to prevent abuse

DEHRADUN, 27 JAN

In a bid to prevent harassment, abuse and other forms of interpersonal violence during the National Games, the Indian Olympic Association (IOA) and the event's organising committee established a helpline to promote safety and well-being of athletes and coaches. The Games, scheduled to open on Tuesday, will run until February 14 in multiple locations across Uttarakhand. "The Indian Olympic Association and the National Games Organising Committee have established a safeguarding telephone helpline as part of a focused initiative to promote safety and well-being," said an IOA release. "The helpline will be available to athletes, coaches, and officials around the clock." It will prioritise the prevention of incidents and maintain the confidentiality of all complaints. The committee has Neetal Narang as chairperson as well as Deepa Mehta.—*PTI*

West Indies clinch first Test victory in Pak in over 34 yrs

WI bowled Pak out for 133 to claim 120-run victory in 2nd Test

MULTAN, 27 JAN

West Indies Jomel Warrican, center, and teammates celebrate after the dismissal of Pakistan's Sajid Khan during the day-three of the second cricket test match between Pakistan and West Indies, in Multan, Pakistan ***PHOTO: PTI***

West Indies spun out Pakistan for 133 to claim a 120-run victory in the second and final Test in Multan, leveling the series. Pakistan, chasing a daunting 178-run target on a turning pitch, collapsed to Jomel Warrican's left-arm spin on Day 3. The win marked the West Indies' first Test victory in Pakistan in over 34 years, with their last win in 1990 in Faisalabad.

Warrican's 5-27, which took his series tally to 19 wickets, played a pivotal role in Pakistan's downfall. Kevin Sinclair (3-61) struck early, dismissing Saud Shakeel and nightwatchman Kashif Ali. Mohammad Rizwan (25) and Salman Ali Agha (15) briefly resisted but fell to Warrican's clever spin. Rizwan was bowled by a ball that spun back, and Salman was trapped lbw.

The West Indies, resuming with a 253-run lead, had posted 244 in their second innings, and Pakistan's batters succumbed to the turning wicket. Earlier, the West Indies had fought back from 7-38 on Day 1, with their tailenders contributing to a slender first-innings lead of nine runs.

Pakistan's captain Shan Masood acknowledged the team's failure to capitalise on early positions and blamed the bowlers for conceding too many runs to the opposition's tailenders. Despite the loss, Masood defended Pakistan's strategy of producing spin-friendly pitches, which had helped them win three of their last four home Tests.

The defeat pushed Pakistan to the bottom of the World Test Championship standings, while the West Indies finished eighth. Despite the setback, Masood expressed optimism, noting that even in defeat, the team learned valuable lessons that would shape future performances. —*PTI*

INDIA'S RATANS

Mandhana, Bumrah crowned ODI, Test cricketers of 2024

DUBAI, 27 JAN

Pace spearhead Jasprit Bumrah was chosen for the men's Test Cricketer of the Year, while big-hitting batter Smriti Mandhana bagged the women's honour in the ODI format as Indian cricketers dominated the ICC individual awards that were rolled out on Monday.

ICC announced three more awardees from its annual list this afternoon, continuing a process that started on Friday. The final two honours -- the men's and women's Cricketer of the Year -- will be revealed on Tuesday and Bumrah is in contention to bag a double after having been named in the Test Team of the Year.

Bumrah was a standout performer in the last 12 months in which he dominated all opposition teams, grabbing 71 wickets from a mere 13 matches at a brilliant average of 14.92.

Bumrah bowled a phenomenal 357 overs in Test cricket in the cycle, maintaining a strike-rate of just 30.1.

Charismatic opener Smriti Mandhana brought further joy for Indian fans as she was named as the women's ODI Cricketer of the Year. She earlier featured in the women's T20 International and ODI Team of the Year. The India vice-captain, who was the ICC women's Cricketer of the Year in 2018 and 2022, racked up 747 runs in 13 innings in 2024 to bag the prestigious award. She put several batting stalwarts, including South Africa's Laura Wolvaardt, England's Tammy Beaumont and West Indies' Hayley Matthews, to shade. The left-hander's tally was the highest among the leading run-getters in Women's ODIs last year, way ahead of Wolvaardt (697), Beaumont (554) and Matthews (469). —*PTI*

Barca thrash Valencia 7-1 in Spanish League

MADRID, JAN 27

Barcelona got back on track in the Spanish league by overwhelming Valencia with four different players scoring in the first 24 minutes of a 7-1 thumping.

Frenkie de Jong opened the scoring in the third minute, Ferran Torres added to the lead in the eighth, Raphinha found the net in the 14th and Fermín López struck in the 24th at Montjuic stadium. López added the fifth in first-half stoppage time as Barcelona ended the first half with a 5-0 lead. Valencia got its goal with Hugo Duro in the 59th before Barcelona scored again with Robert Lewandowski in the 66th and an own-goal by César Tárrega in the 75th.

The victory moved Barcelona within three points of second-placed Atletico Madrid and seven points off leader Real Madrid.

"We hadn't been doing well in the league and we needed to bounce back with a victory like that," López said. "We have to keep fighting." —*PTI*

Praggnanandhaa draws with Gukesh

WIJK AAN ZEE, 27 JAN

Grandmaster R Praggnanandhaa maintained his strong form in the Tata Steel Masters with a solid draw against world champion D Gukesh in the eighth round in Wijk Aan Zee.

Playing white, Praggnanandhaa held a slight advantage in the Berlin Defense, but Gukesh, sacrificing a pawn for counterplay, kept the game balanced. As queens were traded, they reached a rook-and-minor-piece endgame, where Gukesh created an outside passed pawn. Praggnanandhaa's rook struggled to stop it, and after 33 moves, the game ended in a draw. Both players, along with Nodirbek Abdusattorov, who beat Vladimir Fedoseev, share the lead with 5.5 points.

In other results, GM P Harikrishna drew with top-ranked Dutch player Anish Giri. Harikrishna, after a draw in a Ruy Lopez, now has four points. Giri, with his seventh consecutive draw, stands at 3.5 points. Arjun Erigaisi and Leon Luke Mendonca also drew their games against Alexey Sarana and Jorden van Foreest, respectively. Erigaisi has two points, while Mendonca has 2.5.

Gukesh and Praggnanandhaa face off in round 8 of the Tata Steel Chess tournament in Wijk aan Zee ***PHOTO: TATA STEEL CHESS***

In the Challengers section, Nguyen Thai Van Dam took the lead with six points after defeating 14-year-old Miaoyi Lu. R Vaishali drew against Arthur Pijpers, while Divya Deshmukh lost to Kazybek Nogerbek. The tournament will resume after a rest day on Tuesday. —*PTI*

Yakubboev refuses handshake with India's Vaishali

Grandmaster Nodirbek Yakubboev caused a stir at the Tata Steel Chess Tournament when he refused to shake hands with Indian GM R Vaishali before their fourth-round game. Yakubboev, citing religious reasons, later apologised, explaining that as a practising Muslim, he doesn't touch women. In a post on social media, he clarified that he respects Vaishali and her brother R Praggnanandhaa and meant no disrespect. Yakubboev lost the match and is on three points after eight rounds in the Challengers' section. He also informed opponent Irina Bulmaga about his beliefs in advance. —*PTI*

England book semi-final berth in U-19 Women's World Cup

KUCHING, 27 JAN

The victory ensured England will finish in the top two of Super Six Group 2 alongside South Africa ***PHOTO: X***

England joined defending champions India in the semi-finals of the U-19 Women's T20 World Cup with a six-wicket victory over New Zealand.

Tilly Corteen-Coleman and Prisha Thanawala starred with the ball, taking seven wickets between them as New Zealand went from 49 for no loss to 89 all out, leaving England with a modest target of 90.

Corteen-Coleman took 4/8 and Thanawala had 3/19 as the spin twins, in conjunction with impressive glovework from wicket-keeper Katie Jones, proved destructive in sparking a New Zealand collapse with 10 wickets falling for 40 runs.

England made steady work of their total, with openers Jemima Spence and Davina Perrin doing the heavy lifting with 29 and 21 runs respectively as their side required just 11.4 overs to reach their target. The victory ensured England will finish in the top two of Super Six Group 2 alongside South Africa. —*PTI*

NAGAL DROPS OUT OF TOP 100 IN ATP SINGLES

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

After spending 10 straight months in the top-100 in the ATP singles rankings, India's Sumit Nagal on Monday dropped out of the much-desired bracket following a string of poor show while veteran Rohan Bopanna lost his place in top-20 due to an early exit from the Australian Open, where he was defending a lot of points.

Nagal maintained his top-100 rank since March 2024 after first breaking into top-100 in February same year on the back of a good show at the first Major of the season. However, he has lost 16 places to be at number 106 with 565 points in the latest chart. —*PTI*

Aus Open win propels Keys back into top 10

MELBOURNE, 27 JAN

Australian Open women's champion Madison Keys returned to her career-best ranking on Monday and joins three other American women in the WTA top 10, while men's champion Jannik Sinner maintained his significant lead atop the ATP list.

Keys won her first Grand Slam title with a three-set victory over the top-ranked Aryna Sabalenka on Saturday to move from No. 14 and match her career-high at No. 7.

Keys joins fellow Americans Coco Gauff (No. 3), Jessica Pegula (No. 6) and Emma Navarro, who slipped one place to No. 9, in the women's top 10.

Sabalenka, who was attempting to achieve a rare three-peat of the Australian Open title remains at No. 1, and Iga Swiatek stays at No. 2 after her loss to Keys in a thrilling semifinal.

The men's top four rankings remained as they were with Sinner at No. 1 — a spot he's held since June — leading Alexander Zverev, who he beat in straight sets for a second consecutive Australian Open championship on Sunday.

Carlos Alcaraz remains at No. 3, as does Taylor Fritz at No. 4, while Daniil Medvedev slipped two places to No. 7 after a bad-tempered second-round exit at Melbourne. —*PTI*

10,000 TO PARTICIPATE

Stars missing as Uttarakhand National Games begin today

DEHRADUN, 27 JAN

People take part in a torch rally taken out as part of the 38th National Game ***PHOTO: PTI***

Most of the established stars will be missing in action but thousands of other athletes, including the up and coming ones, will get the platform to make a mark in 32 disciplines when the 38th National Games, spread over seven venues in the hill state, begin here on Tuesday.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will declare the Games open at the Rajiv Gandhi International Cricket Stadium here to kick-start the 18-day national showpiece, which will see participation of around 10,000 athletes and officials from 38 teams.

The event is among the biggest in the world, though its relevance in the country's international success has been debatable.

This time, the Games will be held in seven cities of Uttarakhand with Dehradun being the main venue.

The other venues of the Games, which will continue till 14 February, are Haridwar, Nainital, Haldwani, Rudrapur, Shivpuri and New Tehri.

The last edition in Goa in 2023 saw competitions being held in five cities.

The Games will feature all the top Olympic sports like athletics, swimming, shooting, wrestling, badminton, hockey, boxing, weightlifting, football, tennis and table tennis. Alongside, some traditional games like kabaddi and kho kho will also be making an appearance.

Four sports -- kalarippayattu, yogasana, mallakhambh and rafting -- will be demonstration (non-medal) sports. —*PTI*

SWIMMERS FUME AS THEY ENDURE LONG COMMUTES, DELAYS

NEW DELHI, 27 JAN

Logistical issues at the National Games have left swimmers and officials grappling with inadequate arrangements, as their accommodations are located far away from the venue in Haldwani, resulting in lengthy travel time exacerbated by road blockages due to rescheduled triathlon events.

The aquatics events are scheduled from 29 January to 4 February.

Monal Chokshi, SFI's secretary-general, criticised the handling of the situation, saying, "All our concerns were falling on deaf ears. It's only after creating a ruckus that attempts are being made to solve the issue," he told PTI on Monday.

Swimmers have been provided with an official accommodation in Corbett and Bhimtal, which are about 1.5 to 2 hours away from the aquatics venue, while officials were initially stationed in Nainital, 1.5 hours in the opposite direction. This has resulted in a cumulative daily travel time of up to five hours.

Compounding the issue, triathlon events, which were originally set to start on February 6, were preponed to January 28 and are causing road blockages near the aquatics venue. —*PTI*